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OR,
The Tussle at the Big Bonanza.

A Romance of the San Juan
Silver Region.

BY LIEUTENANT A. K. SIMS,
AUTHOR OF "WARBLING WILLIAM," "JOLLY
JEREMIAH," THE "TEXAS TOM-
CAT" NOVELS, ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE LONE WATCHER.

On the rounded crest of Tower Mountain, to which the reluctant snows of winter still clung, a man lay sprawled at full length, apparently heedless of the biting wind which piped and shrieked along the bowlders. Below him and to southward nestled Baker's Park, an emerald in

SAM SENT ON HIGH THE PRECONCERTED SIGNAL.

a cold and stony setting, and beyond that rose the cloven head of Sultan Mountain, a pinnacled buttress of the azure distance. The scenery was wild, grand, and typical of the higher Rockies, mountains being piled against mountains in bewildering confusion, bastioned and terraced, with splintered peaks and abrupt escarpments.

The rugged grandeur of the scenery, the silver and flame of the snow-clad and sun-kissed heights, the masses of brilliant color mottling and penciling the precipitous canyon walls, evidently held little attraction for the lonely watcher. The snow had been scraped from the flat rock on which he lay, and the cold and uneven surface rendered warm and soft by a gaudy Navajo blanket. Ever and anon he lifted a field-glass to his eyes and swept the ledgy entrances to the east and south.

In a cleft of rock near at hand was a rude structure of bowlders and poles, with a blanket stretched over its partially thatched roof. Into this he skurried at intervals, and warmed himself over the low and smokeless fire which burned in its center.

Every day for more than a month he had ascended to the mountain-top from the cozy warmth of the clustering log cabins in the sheltered gulch below and had ranged the snowy fields with that far-reaching glass. At first these ascents were for the purpose of watching for and warning against the threatened raids of their unfriendly Indian neighbors; now they were made with the design of heralding the approach of the long-expected burro train from far Pueblo.

Like the daring Baker, for whom the gem-like park was named, Sam Holcomb had, the previous autumn, led a little band of adventurous spirits into the fastnesses of Silver San Juan. The winter which followed had been of unusual severity, the mountain savages were troublesome, the snows so deep they could only move about on snow-shoes, and game so scarce they came near perishing. But for Holcomb's strong will and iron hand they would have degenerated into a senseless and selfish mob doomed to certain death. As it was, he had to take on himself all the responsibilities of their desperate situation; for which, like the ignorant and narrow-minded men they were, they had only calumnies and reproaches.

This cold and cruel watch on the mountain-top had been rendered absolutely necessary by the peculiar circumstances which surrounded them. Into such besotted wretches had the recently courageous miners been transformed by the terrors of the famine, that they could scarcely lift a hand in their own behalf. Hence Holcomb had assumed this task, along with all the others which events had laid on his shoulders; and its assumption had conferred upon him the title of "Signal Sam."

"It begins to look as if they are right and I am wrong!" he muttered, as he crawled into the shelter of the shapeless hut, when he had ended his last survey. "And yet it *can't* be! The terrible snow is the cause of the delay."

He rubbed his stinging fingers and stared moodily into the fire.

"They are an ungrateful lot of dogs! I ought to have left them to their fate, long ago; to the tender mercies of the Indians and the avalanches! 'Twould have served 'em right! But no! there's ore in these mountains! And we'll get it out, too—if that burro train ever gets here!"

For a half-hour he sat there, listlessly feeding the fire at intervals with dry twigs, thoughtful and otherwise silent. Then, with an effort, he shook off the despondent spell that held him, snatched up the glass and again hurried out.

He had no sooner placed it to his eyes than he gave a low exclamation of delight. The groups of ants on the ledges of the distant divide were resolved into toiling burros and trudging people. *The burro-train was in sight!*

His first exclamation gave way to a series of yells that made the snowy ranges echo. Then, with wild enthusiasm, he rushed into the hut, piled wood and damp bark on the glowing coals; and while the dense smoke was gathering volume, raced back to the rock to take another look.

Yes, the train was there! It was no phantasmagoria conjured by overheated fancy. And, sure of this, he climbed to the top of the rocky wall of the structure, swung loose one end of the blanket roof and allowed a great cloud of smoke to ascend. Then, by alternately replacing and removing it, so as to collect the smoke into puffs or balls, he sent on high the preconcerted signal which was to notify the men below that the train had been sighted.

This done, he kicked the brands asunder, slip-

ped his feet into the straps of his web snow-shoes, and hastened down the mountain at a break-neck speed.

When the gulch was gained he found the men crazy with the exuberance of their joy. They wept and sung and cried; and crowding about him as the sailors crowded about Columbus at the first indication of land, they begged his pardon for their folly, cowardice and suicidal weakness, in tones pitiful in their brokenness.

Then, when the course and location of the train had been made known, they dashed so madly in that direction that Signal Sam found much difficulty in keeping pace with their eager enthusiasm.

Of most of them, however, their strength did not equal their desire; and when the ledges were gained and the train reached, Signal Sam led advance.

The leader of this train, which had made its way over the almost impassable mountain wall in spite of the great depth of the snow, was a man famous in the early days of Colorado mining—being none other than Major John Glenwood, a man who had developed a dozen mineral regions since the days when he had first washed gold dust from the auriferous placers of California.

The meeting between him and Signal Sam was more than cordial; it was the meeting of men who trusted and believed in each other as few men trust and believe.

"Now, allow me to present my daughter!" said the major, withdrawing his crushed hand when he had returned the effusive greetings of all. "Mr. Holcomb, my daughter Grace, who, tired of a Denver boarding-school, wants to see a little natural life, as she expresses it!"

Signal Sam had been painfully aware that two pairs of bright eyes were watching his every movement. The owners of the eyes were perched high on the backs of burros and almost hidden by mountains of wraps, transforming whatever grace of outline they possessed into shapeless masses of wools and furs.

Venturing now to lift his gaze, he acknowledged the introduction; and, a moment later, was presented to the other young woman, Miss Peggy Shields, the servant-friend and companion of the major's comely daughter.

The hideous wraps could not screen Miss Glenwood's beauty; which, while not of the highest and most lovely type, approached the angelic in the eyes of men long deprived of the society and influence of women. And Signal Sam found it so dazzling that he was loth to turn from her and again engage in conversation with the major.

Beauty is said to be only skin deep; and if Miss Glenwood had no other claim to the reader's attention, she could well be dismissed with a passing word. But beyond her comeliness, beautifying and dominating it, was a beauty of soul and a purity of mind, which, in every age and in cities as in mining-camps, has been woman's chief glory and crowning charm. That she had many traits which seemingly belie this statement, and which will be observed in the progress of this story, is only proof that she was after all only a woman, and not that impossible creature so often depicted in the pages of fiction.

Miss Peggy Shields was a tilted nosed, Irish girl, with a vivid complexion, a vivacious tongue and an exuberance of spirits that defies delineation. She was likewise warm-hearted, loyal to friends and bitter as death to foes or those who offended her. Toward her, many admiring glances were turned, to the inexpressible distress of a young man of the burro train who considered her his especial property.

"We've had a terrible time," said the major, walking in advance with Signal Sam as the united parties turned down the mountain slope. "It's been fearful weather, and we barely missed getting caught twice in snow-slides. If I'd had an idea of what a time we were to have in pushing through I'd have left Grace in Denver, I assure you!"

Sam dared not put it in words, but he felt grateful for the fact that coming events are unknowable, and that Miss Glenwood had been permitted to make one of the party. Mingled with this was a depressing and contradictory self-depreciation which told him that, whether she was here in Silver San Juan, or surrounded by the femininity of a boarding-school, she was and must be far above and beyond his hopes and aspirations.

"Yes," continued Glenwood, his thoughts on the hardships of the long journey, "it will take an abundance of good ore to pay us for it. You wrote me that you had struck it rich. Has it turned out equal to your expectations?"

This led to a low rehearsal of the troubles of the bitter winter, to which the major gave a close and attentive ear.

"The scoundrels!" he growled, when the recital came to an end. "I have met men of their stamp too often. They are all right as long as they have plenty to eat and the finds are rich, but if anything goes wrong they are as ungrateful and treacherous as Apaches. Well, they'll toe the mark now, or we'll know the reason why. I've got a good lot of men in this train—men who'll stay with us and stand no nonsense."

Then they descended into the gulch, and the wearisome journey was at an end.

CHAPTER II.

BALDOR, THE PIGMY.

A PISTOL-SHOT, followed by an imitation Indian war-whoop, resounded along the narrow street, and Major Glenwood, who was sitting in the office room of his comfortable log house, frowned deeply and muttered a low imprecation.

"That's Dean!" he said, to Signal Sam, who was seated near him. "I don't know what to do with the fellow."

Sam smiled mysteriously, as a reply; and, rising, the two approached the window and looked out upon the street.

"Yes, it's Dean!" the major growled, holding aside the curtain, for of course the window contained no glass. "And he's with that detestable gambler!"

Great changes had taken place in the six weeks that had elapsed since the advent of the burro train; changes in some respects for the better and in many for the worse. The location of the town, if town it may be called, had been transferred to the edge of the valley, and the increase in the number and the better appearance of the buildings was something wonderful.

The camp had likewise taken on a name, and was known as Silverton, though it should not be confounded with the Silverton of to-day, which arose some time later, in the grassy valley called Baker's Park.

The coming of Glenwood's party had not only been a powerful stimulus, but the addition of his force to that already within the gulch, had so augmented the working capacity of the camp, that the marvelous results already accomplished seemed but a prophecy of the season's achievements.

A gold mine of considerable richness had been discovered in Arastra Gulch, a few miles away, and was now being developed by a constructed arastra which, worked by the little stream, was of sufficient capacity to crush the gold-bearing quartz. Almost at the same time valuable and promising silver leads had been located, the fame of which, getting abroad in some manner, had drawn a heterogeneous crowd from the four ends of the earth.

Thus the major's visions of a little Eden in that far-away spot had been dissipated, for the place became at once as wild as the unwieldy, vicious element could make it.

Among these unwelcome new-comers was Kid Adair, a Denver gambler, who brought a burro train over the steeps, loaded with fiery liquor and all the devices known to men of his kidney; and who immediately established the "Gold Placer," a saloon and gambling hell of the worst type.

"I don't know what to do with him!" Glenwood repeated, speaking of the man he had called Dean. "I suppose, though, I'll have to discharge him."

With sorrowing eyes he gazed on the scene revealed by the pulling aside of the curtain!

A tall, handsome man, with shapely white hands, scrupulously neat dress, high silk hat, and that indefinable air which everywhere stamps the sport and gambler, was walking slowly up the street, chaffing nonsense with a lank, awkward fellow whose hilarity found vent in frequent yells and skyward pistol-shots.

Glenwood was bitterly opposed to the gambling fraternity, and hated the whisky element with an honest ardor that found frequent expression in scornful and stinging words. The result had been to bring upon him all the enmity and malevolence of the classes he so strenuously opposed—Signal Sam receiving an equal share of their execrations for the simple reason that he was always the major's staunch friend and ally.

"Adair does that just to vex me!" declared Glenwood, turning away from the window. "He knows Dean's weakness; and, believing the fellow to be a sort of ward of mine, gets him drunk and parades him along the street in that kind of style. Well, the only result will be that Dean will get his walking papers; then if he cares to

herd with that crowd, he can do so to his heart's content. But he can't do it longer, as an employee of mine."

"Don't be hard on him!" Signal Sam urged, with that same odd smile. "He's true as steel—that I'm certain of. To be candid, major, I had a talk with him not long ago, and he's keeping his eyes on Adair for our especial benefit."

"Eh?" and the major started.

"For our especial benefit!" Sam repeated. "He's—"

He ceased abruptly, and hurrying from the room soon returned, dragging a diminutive specimen of humanity by the gold-braided collar of its scarlet cloak.

"What were you doing out there?" he demanded, jamming the queer figure into the depths of a big chair. "Speak up, now, or it will be the worse for you."

There was a look of mingled fear and cool assurance on the odd, childish-old face that looked up into his. The form was that of a boy, judging alone by size and stature; but the pigmy was rather a man than a boy. His face was wrinkled and seamed, yet with a kind of boyish freshness in its color that belied the other indications of age. And, as for his person, it was dwarfish, with a misshapen and disfiguring lump at the back which the folds of the scarlet cloak could not conceal; and his limbs were short and ludicrously bowed.

"Now, what were you doing there, Baldor?" Sam again demanded, glowering into the wrinkled face.

"Nothing, sir!" came the mumbled reply.

"A likely yarn! Now, look you, you crafty little wretch! I found you out there in the niche of the bluff overhanging the eaves of this house; and you were peering into this room and trying to hear what we were saying! Is it not so?"

An unintelligible reply, mingled with exasperating chuckles, was again mumbled.

"Who sent you here?" Glenwood asked, in tones less stern.

"Sent myself. I'm of age, I am!" with a defiant toss of the shaggy head.

"You mean you came at Adair's orders?" Sam interjected!

"Sent myself. I'm of age, I am!" Baldor repeated.

"And what did you come for?" Glenwood continued.

"Rock lichens. There's lots of 'em up there. I was looking for them when he bagged me."

Signal Sam was amazed at the dwarf's audacity and ready wit. He knew Baldor had climbed to the roof for the sole purpose of hearing what they had to say while Adair was passing with the howling miner, and he believed he had done so at the gambler's request. Perhaps the latter hoped to gain some valuable bit of information to be evoked by the incident. Or he may only have an idle curiosity to gratify. But, whatever the motive, he was sure Adair had sent the dwarf.

Baldor, as he sat there, curled up like a comfortable kitten, and with his keen eyes on the alert, looked more like a fun-loving monkey than anything else; and, Sam was certain, had never presented a more comical appearance in his wildest antics in the glittering rooms of the Gold Placer.

The jauntily dressed and scarlet cloaked fun-maker of the gambling bells seemed to enjoy the confusion and annoyance his discovery had created. It may have been only seeming, for he may have come on a mission and had that mission thwarted. But, neither Signal Sam nor the keen-eyed major could read the misshapen enigma perched so nonchalantly before them.

"Come!" Sam exclaimed, loth to give up the attempt. "What's twenty words of truth worth from your lips?" and he jingled a handful of coin in his pockets. "Name the price, say the words, and the money is yours."

"A dollar a word!" was the quick reply. "Can't afford to talk for less. Get more than that sometimes, over at Adair's. That is, when I sing out just right and have the cards to back me."

"All right; a dollar a word for twenty words. But I won't pay for lies, you understand. Now, who sent you here? Was it Adair?"

"Yes!"

"Keep a count, Mr. Glenwood. That's one dollar."

"And he sent you to spy on us?"

"No!"

"Put it down, Mr. Glenwood. Two dollars."

"What did he send you for, then?"

"To give you an invitation to attend the Placer Palace to-night. There's going to be a big dance. A fly time! A blow-out, with oceans of

fun; and he wouldn't miss having you come for a fortune."

"Kept track of all that, Glenwood? I'll bet you haven't!"

Then he cocked his head on one side in an exasperating manner, and proceeded to count up the number of words he had given expression to.

"Thirty-seven, as I'm a truth-teller! And the other two make thirty-nine! I ought to have squeezed in one more and made it an even forty. That kind of business pays better than a faro bank."

He thrust his tongue into his cheek and a hand into a pocket, and drew out two neatly-printed invitations, one of which he gave to Glenwood and the other to Sam.

"There you are, gents. You'll see that your names are writ there, and that this ain't no fake of mine. Mr. Adair sent them and they're genuine."

"But hold on, What am I doing? I ought to have made you ask me about all of that, and got good dollars for my information. Maybe you wouldn't mind asking anyhow, just to keep up the play. Gentlemen, the ball's a-rolling! Gentlemen! the wheel's a-going round! Time's money, gentlemen! Make your bets!"

And, with a ludicrous imitation of the dealers' cries, he subsided into a series of chuckles.

"I think he's got you, Sam!" Glenwood declared. "This looks genuine, and I believe he's told the truth. Adair has sent these to irritate us, knowing we wouldn't accept them."

"I don't know about that. I think I shall."

With this astonishing statement, he slipped a twenty dollar gold-piece into the dwarf's hands, and the latter, with a flirt of his scarlet cloak, glided from the room with reptilian stealth.

CHAPTER III.

THE PLACER CARNIVAL.

THE Placer Palace was only a log affair, in spite of its high-sounding name, but it was larger than any other building in Silverton, and its appointments were really palatial when the toil and cost of getting them there is considered. Heavy billiard tables had been brought piecemeal across the wild slopes on the backs of burros, and everything in the place represented the lavish outlay of money.

Of course Kid Adair did not go to all this expense without an almost certain knowledge that every dollar spent would return to him a thousand-fold. The Placer Palace became the leading resort of the entire region, and the fortunes that were won and lost over its tables were often great.

Brawls, too, were not infrequent, and the crack of the pistol of the ruined gamester had abundant company in the skirmish-like reports that, now and then, rolled through the halls and corridors.

Standing in a nook of the main room, which contained the bar and the billiard-tables, Signal Sam looked over the throng which was gathering, and endeavored to ask himself why he had come.

It was the night of the "blow-out" mentioned by Billy Baldor, the suspected messenger, and the rooms of the big, rambling structure were already crowded. Liquors flowed like water in a June freshet; the calls of the dealers in the other apartments floated distinctly above the monotonous hum; the click of billiard balls sounded close at hand, while the heat and effluvia were simply stifling.

At the further end of the long room a rude platform had been erected and garlanded with boughs, and on this platform three or four crack-voiced and bedizened cyprians were singing and dancing for the delectation of the mixed throng.

"It's the devil's own den!" Sam muttered, disgusted with the sights, sounds, and odors that assailed him. "I believe I'll go home. There can't any good come of my remaining here!"

At that moment the scarlet cloak of Baldor came into view.

The little imp was rigged out most fantastically, and had been making merry for a group of gay young fellows at the opposite side of the room. He was a keen-witted, sharp-tongued buffoon, and as a fun-maker had few equals. Hence Kid Adair valued his services highly, for many men came to the Placer to witness the antics and laugh at the jests of the dwarf, who were afterward induced to squander their money on liquors and games.

"So, you are here!" poking at Signal Sam with a short wand he carried in his character of the Placer Palace clown. "I feared you wouldn't have the courage! And you'll stay to the carnival? It won't be long, now. You would look well in a mask—you would, by my

faith! Say the word, and I'll have a costume ordered for you. What shall it be? A gay lothario? A knightly chevalier with a sword that won't cut and a scarlet cloak like this? Or, if you'd rather, and a damsel and a balcony can be procured, you might your try hand at an impersonation of the sighing Romeo. Come, which shall it be?"

"Neither!" said Sam, who did not altogether relish the dwarf's bantering tone. "I think I shall go home."

"Oh!" with an uplifting of the painted eyebrows. "Sated so soon! That's too bad. If you'd mix a little, just a little, with the company, you'd quickly get over that. You're too much like a stranger in a strange land. If you won't mask, stay till the unmasking and you may see something to surprise you."

With this injunction Baldor hurried away, leaving Signal Sam in a strangely puzzled mood.

"What did the fellow mean by that last?" he questioned. "It had a ring of truth about it. The little scamp mystifies and annoys me, and excites my curiosity at the same time. Can he have meant what he said?"

While pondering this, the announcement of the commencement of the carnival was made.

"I'll stay!" Sam avowed, as the sweeping flourish of the violins came to him. "Baldor has lied to me, no doubt, but I'll see the thing out anyway."

Five minutes later he found himself alone, the anxious throng having hurried away to don their costumes. But the room was quickly filled again with lords and ladies, knights and dominoes, kings and courtiers, priests and nuns, sailors and miners, Malay pirates, Chinamen, and a mingling of people of all time and every nationality and occupation. The costumes were mostly cheap affairs of tinsel and calico, but the effect under the brilliant light was dazzling.

"You ought to get behind the bar!" squeaked Baldor, hurrying by in the guise of a fairy prince; and Sam, glancing about, saw that he and the bartenders were the only ones undisguised.

"I do look a little out of place, and conspicuous," he averred, edging nearer the railing. "What's the scamp up to? He seems to have me under his special protection to-night!"

There came no answer to this, and as the dancers whirled away, he forgot the singular circumstance in watching their evolutions and in listening to the voice of the caller and the music of the instruments.

It was verging on morning and the dancers were becoming tired, when a black domino stopped his whirling evolutions in front of Signal Sam, and, in a voice thickened by frequent potations, growled.

"Well, now, what do you want with me? I've had enough of your insolence for one night!"

Signal Sam started. The voice, in spite of its thickened utterance, was entirely familiar. It was the voice of "Lucky George" Bruce, the foreman of a promising mine, and an aspirant for the hand of Grace Glenwood. What surprised Sam almost to stupefaction was the belief he had previously entertained that George did not drink, and was in fact as much opposed to the saloons and gambling halls as himself.

A flush of anger arose to Signal Sam's face at the insolent words. The thought occurred to him that, as they were in a sense rivals, Bruce, made irritable and incautious by liquor, was seeking to draw him into a fight.

"I don't know that I understand you," he made answer.

"Yes, you do; you understand me well enough! I reckon you'll say you haven't been sending me insulting messages all evening?"

"Yes, I'll say that; for I haven't."

"And that you didn't send for me just now?"

"I'll say that, too!"

"I knew you would! Well, you're a white-livered puppy, and have been spying on me to carry tales to Miss Glenwood. So, take that!"

He flung out his hand and struck the unoffending man a resounding blow in the face.

The next instant he had measured his full length on the floor, for Signal Sam, made wild by the blow, had promptly knocked him down.

He arose, panting and furious, and attempted to draw a weapon, but was seized by a party of maskers and promptly disarmed.

"No fighting in here, gentlemen!" cried Kid Adair, bustling forward. "If you have any little dispute to settle walk into the street. There's too big a crowd in here to-night to have bullets flying promiscuously about."

Signal Sam, trembling with anger and humiliation, said not a word, but inwardly cursed himself for venturing near the place.

"It's all right!" cried Bruce, whose brain had been cleared somewhat by that knock-down blow. "I had a little too much on board, that's all. I insulted the gentleman, and he knocked me down. That evens things, and I'm willing to cry quits."

As he said it he extended his hand, which Sam grasped warmly; and while their heads were thus close together "Lucky George" whispered:

"Baldor lied to me, I suppose. You and I can't fight each other. It would be said we were fighting over the young lady, and that would settle us both with the Glenwoods."

Then he turned away and was soon lost in the crowd; and Sam, with brain whirling and mystified, walked slowly homeward in the crisp morning air.

CHAPTER IV.

PEGGY'S OPINIONS.

"You've heered o' the throuble?" said Peggy Shields, giving her nose a still further tilt skyward. "Och, those men do be fools, sure!"

"All except Jack Dean!"

"And he do be a bigger than anny o' thim! 'Twas at the ball last night, Miss Grace. Av ye won't ax me, thin I'll tell annyhow."

With this consoling declaration Miss Shields stopped short, and showed no disposition to proceed further until questioned.

"Well, what were you going to say?" Miss Glenwood queried, her curiosity thus aroused. "You spoke of trouble! What about it?"

"So, ye aren't daf, thin! 'Pon me word, I thought ye wor; an' that it worn't anny use to go on wearin' me lungs out. Yis; they wor throuble at the ball last night; and they do be sayin' it wor betune Mr. Holcomb and Mr. Lucky George; and that the cause av it all wor a young lady wid which I'm well acquainted."

Grace flushed.

"Tell me about it!" she appealed, laying a white hand on the Irish girl's shoulder. "What did you hear?"

"I didn't hear so much, Miss Grace; but I guessed a d'ale;—an' the heft o' me guessin' is this: Mr. Sam wor at the Placer last night—"

"Are yor sure, Peggy? I thought he never went there!"

"That aren't part o' me guessin'. He wor there, or else Jack do be a bigger liar than I ever believed he could be. He wor there, as I say; though what he wor there for I don't know. Jack said he niver put on a mask, nor took part in the dance, and that he kem away as sober as a mine-boss."

"The rest av what I'm tellin' you do be part guessin'. A felly dressed in black and wid a mask on insulted him, and he knocked the felly down, as anny dacint mon would, an' for which I'm gloryin'. Who the felly wor nobody samed to know. But I say, and Jack says, he wor Lucky George; an', bein' drunk, he said something concernin' of ye which Mr. Sam didn't loike, and down he went."

"But Mr. Bruce doesn't drink!" Grace protested.

"As ye loike about that. I've towld ye what I think, an' ye ken figger it out as ye plase."

Miss Glenwood seemed plunged in disagreeable thought, and Peggy sat staring at the far-away snow-clad mountains, and fiddling with her apron-strings as if she had more to say when that had been digested.

"I've some opinions o' me own, Miss Grace!" breaking a silence that was becoming unbearable. "This ain't nayther the ind nor the beginnin' av throuble. Kid Adair is at the bottom av the pot, a-pokin' the fires, loike the devil's own that he is. And that sly little devil av a Baldor is a-helpin' him."

Grace raised her head and stared wonderingly at her companion.

"Ye moight settle the throuble, miss, av ye'd give one or the other his walkin'-papers. But, that ye won't. And Jack he do be sayin' the same."

"Why, if what you say is correct, and they're silly enough to fight about—I mean if they're silly enough to act that way, I don't see that I can do anything!" and the flush with which this was said showed the coquettish heart which lay beneath. "I'm inclined to think, too, Peggy, that you're altogether mistaken in your judgment. I've been assured that George never goes near the Placer Palace."

"As you will, miss!" with an alarming tilt of the freckled nose. "I worn't m'anin' to spake about the fight, though. It's worse nor that I'm

thinkin' on. I say, an' Jack he do be sayin' the same, that Kid Adair is strikin' daper than ken be sane on the surface. He's a-strikin' at these min, and t'rough thim at yer father an' yer own silf. He's a long-headed, schamin' chap, an' the toime 'll come whin ye'll bel'ave what I say an' what Jack says."

"Oh, you're always dragging in Jack's opinions!" Miss Glenwood declared, scarcely knowing what reply to return to Peggy's remarkable statement. "Perhaps Adair is striking at you, through Jack. I believe you stated that he was at the ball."

"Against me will, he wor, miss. But, he kep' away from the liquor and wint about wid his eyes open."

"And so did Holcomb."

"Thru for ye. He did that! He's a thruer mon anny day than is that Lucky George; and av ye'd take me advice, which Heaven knows is well mint, ye'd send him thravelin', that ye would."

"Which?" with a little laugh, that was not at all heartfelt.

"Lucky George! You know who I m'ane. I'd pack him off, that I would."

"Really, Peggy, I must say that I don't understand anything you're saying!" Grace declared, the feeble smile fading into sober seriousness. "You speak of danger. What danger can there be?"

The Irish girl's face lightened.

"I may be wrong, and Jack may be wrong, miss. Sure, we can't always be right, ye know! But we've been a-talkin' av it over, an' our opinions is there's trouble ahead."

When speaking slowly and deliberately Peggy almost dropped her brogue, which was of a peculiar kind owing to her long stay in the mining regions.

"Mr. Glenwood an' Sam have insulted the gamblers, as it wor, by their inimity, ye know; and thim villains will do annything to get aven. They got both av yer swatehearts into their den last night, an' would have had both av thim howlin', fightin' drunk av they could. Aven as it wor, there was trouble; which, Jack says, kem nigh bein' serious."

"They'll have thim fellys fightin' yet, and it'll be said you wor the cause. Signal Sam is a mon among min. Give the other felly the go-by for gittin' drunk last night."

"But, as I said an' as Jack says, ye won't do that."

"Mebbe, though, ye'll say to yer father what Jack said to me. 'Twor this:

"'Peggy,' says he, 'have Miss Grace say to her father that I'm knowin' to the fact that Kid Adair is settin' on foot a scheme to drive both him and Signal Sam out av the country!'

"That's what Jack said, Miss Grace; and I'll stake me life, if he do git drunk sometimes, that whin he said it he knowed what he wor talkin' about!"

CHAPTER V.

A GALLANT ACT.

GRACE GLENWOOD was more troubled by Peggy's statements than she gave indications of being. She was nettled, humiliated and chagrined by the encounter in the Placer Palace between men who were regarded by the public as suitors for her hand. The result would be that, until the next sensation, her name would be bandied about by rough miners in the dens of vice which so thickly abounded.

Her face burned as she thought of it. She had not especially encouraged attentions from either of the men. Like many another pretty girl similarly circumstanced she had been flattered by their admiration. She felt sure that was all!

"And now! And now!"

She crouched in the low arm-chair and gave way to a flood of silent tears, when Peggy had left the room.

Her anger burnt fiercest against Signal Sam. Peggy had said there could be no doubt as to his identity, for he had remained unmasked throughout the evening.

"It was more the act of a gentleman, though!" she whispered, with a sudden mental rebound. "He didn't sulk behind a disguise and try to evade the consequences of his act. I wonder what George said to him?"

Then she went over in imagination the scene which Peggy's words had conjured up. The fantastically-arrayed maskers; the blaze of lamps; the suffocating clouds of tobacco smoke; the drunken rabble, reeling and jeering. In the midst, Signal Sam and the black domino, believed to be Lucky George Bruce, exchanging blows.

"And about me!" she thought, cowering still lower. "About me!"

After a little she arose, donned heavier clothing, and went out into the chill morning air. The snow banners were flying from the mountain peaks, but along the upland slopes and in the sheltered crevices early wild flowers were growing.

She had a basket on her arm; and one seeing her emerge would have thought her bent on one of her customary rambles.

She was agile of foot and lithe of limb, and it did not take her long to scale the rocky wall shutting in the gulch where the town nestled; but when the sheltered homes of the wild flowers were gained, she paid no heed to them.

Her pulses were bounding with an energy not wholly due to the exercise, as she flung herself down against a bluff wall, where the screaming wind could not reach her, and gave herself up to reflection.

"I've a good mind to improve on Peggy's advice and give them both their walking papers. What are they to me, that I should be thus insulted? Nothing! Absolutely nothing!"

The harshness of her tones almost startled her. She had, in the intensity of her feeling, fairly screamed the last exclamation, and now looked guiltily about to make sure no one had heard her.

A venturesome, black-tailed deer was the only thing in sight; and it, peering from a wooded height, seemed comiserating her with its lustrous, dark eyes.

"I wonder I didn't frighten the poor thing out of the country!" and she laughed hysterically, as she scrambled to her feet and hurried on up the slope.

How long and how far she wandered she scarcely knew, but the sun was above the tallest spurs of the range when she halted and looked about her.

"My! I'm two miles from home, and near the Eureka Mine!" she ejaculated; and reddened as she recalled the fact that Lucky George was the superintendent of the Eureka.

"I hope he hasn't seen me!" descending into the canyon at her feet. "I don't know what he might think about it. It's none of his business how much I wander around, but he might be fool enough to think that I strolled this way on purpose to see him. Men are such egotists!"

She smiled scornfully as she cast a pebble into the torrent which foamed and churned against the rocks, after having cut its way through the heart of the mountain.

Having thus given vent to her feelings, she sought a comfortable seat on a projecting boulder and proceeded to devour the lunch she had been thoughtful enough to provide.

As she sat there, diverting herself by watching the racing current and studying the stratified and brilliantly colored canyon walls, she was aroused by an ominous, roaring and booming, which sounded as if some mighty tempest of the primeval world had been suddenly launched on its destroying track.

She rose quickly, with a startled air, and stared up and down the canyon for some sign to interpret the meaning of the strange sound. The mountains were coldly silent as when she had last looked at them, the wind was stirring the aspen leaves on the nearer slopes, and the snow-capped peaks were still flaunting their white banners.

"What *can* it be?" she questioned, wildly. "Surely not an earthquake!"

Then she stood still, wild-eyed, and petrified by the sudden fear which had assailed her. A white line of foam had arisen in the canyon wall a half-mile away; and she knew by intuition that the powerful dam used by the Eureka Company to turn aside the stream for mining purposes had given way, and that she was in the direct pathway of this loosened and screaming flood.

With the bound of a frightened fawn she sprang toward the precipitous path by which she had descended; but a loosened boulder flung her back, bruised, bleeding and half senseless. Then with the roar of the mighty cataract in her ears she awaited with what calmness she could the death that seemed in store for her.

She was aroused by a ringing shout, and knew that a man had raced down the slope at the imminent risk of his neck and was endeavoring to rescue her. But, such a deathly feeling of faintness assailed her she could not rouse herself to see who it was or to aid herself in the slightest degree.

She had a consciousness of being lifted in a pair of strong arms, heard the thunder of the rushing flood, felt the cliffs jar and tremble as if they had been smitten by the ponderous ham-

mer of Thor—then, with the panting breath of her deliverer in her face, she swooned into utter unconsciousness.

When she recovered she was lying on the rocky incline above, with Lucky George bending over her and chafing her hands and wrists. A fleeting impression that a kiss had been imprinted on her lips lingered with her as she arose to a sitting posture. The terrible flood had spent its force, but mementoes of its destroying progress were visible in the uprooted trees and the giant boulders hurled from their beds far up the heights.

A grateful look came to the young man's face when he saw that she was only slightly injured. It was a handsome face, by the way, with firm lips shaded by a dark mustache, aquiline nose, and eyes of steel gray. But, except when he smiled, there were harsh and cruel lines in it.

"You are unhurt?" he said, tenderly. "There was blood on your lips, and I thought—"

"I fell," she explained, wiping away the stains with her handkerchief. "It is nothing."

"It's lucky I saw you when I did!" he exclaimed, assisting her to a seat. "If I had not, I could not have been in time to aid you."

She shuddered as she recalled the terrible danger, and a look of sincere gratitude came into her face when she thought of the fearful risk the young man had taken in her behalf.

"I can't tell you how thankful I am, Mr. Bruce!" she said, lifting her shining eyes to his. "When I am more myself perhaps I can. Oh, it was awful!"

"You exaggerate the peril!" he declared. "I saw you when you first came over the ridge, a half-hour ago; and when the dam gave way I knew you were in the canyon, and ran down here without stopping to think of anything else. I reached you ahead of the water, and carried you up here. That's all there was of it!"

"And in doing so placed your own life in imminent risk. I know, Mr. Bruce, even if I wasn't conscious the entire time. Had you remained in there five seconds more neither of us could have escaped."

"'Twas a close scratch!" he acknowledged, reddening pleasantly. "I trust you will give me the credit of believing I would do it again, though, if it was necessary."

"Now, if you'll allow me to assist you, we'll go on toward the town. The miners are hurrying this way, and I can see that some of the people are working up the slope from below. Your father may be among the number, and I'm sure you don't want to keep him in suspense."

She could not but admire his thoughtfulness. Permitting him to assist her to her feet, she accepted the proffered arm, for she was still weak and giddy; and together they slowly descended from the heights.

They soon met the foremost of those coming from Silverton. These stared at them curiously, asked a few questions as to the cause of the dam giving way and the amount of damage occasioned by the flood, and hurried on.

"It will take a good deal of time and a considerable amount of money to put things to rights," he said, as they walked onward, after the departure of the eager questioners. "But the mine is paying well and the owners can easily afford the outlay."

"If you had perished, though, in those awful waters, life would have been worth little to me."

"Don't!" she pleaded, thinking of the scene in the Placer Palace. "At some other time I may feel like listening to you. But not now. At least, not on that subject. I am not quite myself, you know. My nerves are strained, and my brain spins like a top."

"As you please!" he returned, with a disappointed air. "I shall take advantage of your promise, though, and speak my mind at some other time. You must know what I mean!"

She gave him a reproachful glance, and he quickly turned the conversation into another channel.

A little further down Mr. Glenwood was encountered. He was hastening on, quite out of breath, when Bruce saw and hailed him.

"So, you are safe!" he cried, filled with exuberant delight. "You've no idea how alarmed I was about you. You were seen going in the direction of the canyon, and some way the impression came to me that you might have been in it when the dam gave way."

"I was, father," she replied, with a subdued air; and then told, with womanly modesty, the story of her rescue.

The tears came into Glenwood's eyes as he listened, and at its conclusion he grasped Bruce's hand with a warmth that fully portrayed his gratitude.

The latter, coloring under the encomiums heaped on him by father and daughter, deftly excused himself and hurried away, his mind filled with emotions of pleasure and gratification.

The town, rung with his praises soon after, for the generous major took extreme delight in heralding far and wide the story of the brave exploit which had saved to him his daughter.

Signal Sam heard of it, as he was hurrying to view the havoc created by the unpent torrent.

"He deserves his title," he muttered. "That kind of luck never comes in my way; and yet I would lay down my life for the girl should it become necessary. It was a brave act, and Lucky George deserves full credit. But, why couldn't it have been me?"

He strode on, with head bowed.

"Yes; of course I'm glad he rescued her. Not for worlds would I have had her perish. But, why couldn't some one else have been near? Why was it George? I'm much afraid that ends my chances in the race—if I ever had any!"

He laughed strangely, and shaking off the queer feeling that was taking possession of him, hurried on his way, anxious to reach the scene of desolation and find something else with which to occupy his thoughts.

CHAPTER VI.

JACK DEAN, THE "HORNY HANDED."

WHILE brooding alone in his little room, the following night, Signal Sam was aroused by a light tap on the door. The tap was followed by the gliding entrance of a man, a tall, shambling fellow dressed in rough, miner grab, and with a big, slouched hat half concealing his broad, good-humored face.

"All alone, eh?" he queried, in a high, treble voice that was wholly out of keeping with his appearance. "That's good!"

He sunk into a vacant chair with a low laugh that sounded more like the squeaking of mice than anything else with which it may be compared, and then stared and blinked at the belongings of the room and its occupant with an odd, owl-like sort of gravity.

And this singular person was Jack Dean, whose opinion Peggy Shields was so fond of quoting. Jack Dean, the "Horny Handed," as both enemies and friends frequently termed him. "Horny Handed" because of the prominent part he had once taken in a strike in Denver—a strike so wide-spread and general that it seemed a labor upheaval, and of which Dean was the guiding and moving spirit.

The face, as has been said, was a broad and good-humored one, without the vestige of a beard, and with an upturning of the corners of the mouth seen in most people whose sense of the ludicrous is strong. But, there were lines of weakness in it, too. Lines fully justified by Dean's fatal fondness for strong drink, the indulgence of which changed him at times into more brute than man.

"Draw up to the fire," urged Sam. "It must be chilly out to-night. Glad to see you, sure, old fellow. I've got a touch of the mopes I'm afraid. No news floating round this evening, I suppose?"

Though he asked the question in such an indifferent, nonchalant tone, he was really consumed with anxious curiosity, for that Dean did not come without a purpose he was certain.

Dean yawned and hitched nearer the fire as if not at all in a hurry.

"Hain't been round to the Placer; not this evening! Most o' the news gin'ally gethers round there, ye know. No use at all takin' a paper ef you go 'bout the Placer onc't in awhile. You kin hear ever'thing that happens, there; and sometimes a good many things that don't happen."

"Very true!" assented Sam, striving to conceal his impatience.

"But I was there yisterday evenin' er rather last night," Dean continued, after another owl-like survey. "Went over to talk 'bout the flood and other happenin's. Been tryin' to keep my eyes open fer you an' the major, as you said; an' I thought as how there might be somethin' interestin' whispered. 'Bout Lucky George and the gal, you understand, what he drug out o' the canyon jist in time to keep her frum bein' drowned er smashed by a big boulder."

The squeaking voice ceased and the speaker reclined lazily in the chair as if expecting questions or waiting to see what effect the communication would have on his hearer.

"Well, go on," Sam urged, in a slightly irritable tone. "Did you see or hear anything? Of course you did, or you wouldn't be here. What was it? You put me on nettles the way you drawl out your piecemeal information."

He of the "horny hand" laughed so convulsively, and yet so lowly, that it seemed a score of mice had been imprisoned in the adjoining closet.

"Gittin' int'rested! Well, may I be dinged! I'll have to tell that to Peggy. Takes somethin' kinned to a snowslide or a airthquake to wake you up."

"Yes; I seen somethin' an' I heerd somethin', an' that's why I'm hyer. I lounged round a good deal, chattin' with the boys an' sich, till it was gittin' purty tol'ble late. All the while I'd been keepin' my eyes on Kid Adair, and on that pesky little red-cloaked Baldor, and I wasn't long in comin' to ther conclusion that somethin' more'n common was in the wind."

"Baldor's allus a-flyin' round, with his cloak floppin' like the wings of a big, red bat; but yesterday evenin' he was most mortal busy, a-chin-nin' this feller an' that, an' a-divin' hyer and there 'sif he was bewitched. Think's I to myself, I'll watch the rascal. And I did, an' what I diskivered I'm hyer to tell."

He squeaked out another series of chuckles, and again surveyed the room.

"Hain't no place 'bout hyer whur any one could spy an' listen, is they?" he questioned, getting up and peering into the closet.

"Not unless the listeners hide in that closet."

"No? Dinged if I want to publish this bizness, you understand. Sence you ketched Blador a-spyin' on you and the major that time, I've been kind o' skeered."

"Well, 'twas this way," sinking again into the chair and twisting his long neck into a knot in his efforts to look behind every article of furniture. "'Twas this way: After watchin' Baldor a goodish spell, I see that all the fellers he'd been a-whisperin' to was a-vanishin', as you might say. I'd see him talkin' to 'um, and another minute when I looked they'd be gone."

"That sort o' curious circumstance set me to thinkin' that a meetin' was a-goin' to be held some 'eres; an' though I hadn't any invite, I settled in my mind that I'd attend if I could find the meetin'-house. Finally, by clost watchin', I found out that all the fellers was a-goin' up-stairs and into a certain room, and I set about seein' if I couldn't go in, too, er git nigh 'nough to hear the talk."

"'Twas the little room lookin' out toward the hills, and I'd been up there onc't when some heavy bettin' was bein' done on cards, and so knowed jist how it was located. They's a hall runs along one side, and at the back the porch looks up at one winder."

"'Twas kind o' darkish, and I took the resk o' climbin' up onto that porch. Had a narrer shave frum doin' of that, too! Hadn't been up there but a little spell when a feller clumb out on that dinged little roof, an' went peekin' 'bout 'sif to see if they was any one spyin'. He didn't seem to think any one might be right there under the winder, an' so looked out into the yard and down below where the lights was a-shinin', and all around purty near 'cept the plum, identical spot where I was a-layin'."

"I'd 'a' give half my int'rest in the next silver mine I run acrost, to 'a' been away from there, too, 'bout that time. 'Twas intirely too dinged clost to be comfortable; an' while I was a-layin' there shakin' like any blame aspen, the sweat rolled off o' me ekal to the water in the canyon yisterday."

This was plainly a bit of hyperbole, but the manner in which it was uttered left no doubt of the truthfulness of the main details of the narrative.

"Yes! Yes!" growled Signal Sam, anxious to get at the meat of the matter. "Go on. What did you hear? That's what I'm curious to know."

"Well, they held a meetin'," Dean squeaked, with exasperating slowness. "Didn't much come of it, s'fur's I could understand. I couldn't hear ever'thing, for they talked most provokin' low. But what I did hear showed that they're dead ag'in' you and the major, and that if they kin they're a-goin' to drive both o' ye out o' the country. 'Tany rate, they're a-goin' to make the effort, and if they fail 'twon't be for lack of tryin'."

"Sing'larest thing 'bout it, though," he continued, "is that, if't hadn't been for that little a'fair yisterday, Lucky George would 'a' gone, too. That is, if they could have made him. Him a-savin' of the girl caused 'em to favor him, as ye might say; and so they 'lowed they'd let him stay. Can't understand that, I can't; though I've studied over it the endurin' day."

Signal Sam also seemed to think this a very strange circumstance, and sat for some time in deep thought.

"I don't know that we ought to suspect

George," he said at length, in a tone showing that he was still thinking the matter over. "He's been as dead against Kid Adair as either I or the major."

"On'y seeming, ding it!" squealed the horny-handed. "I've said so a dozen times, and I say so ag'in."

"But we've no proof," Sam declared, determined to be generous even in his thoughts of his rival. "We can't back our opinions, and in life, as in the gaming-room, unbacked opinions don't amount to much. To all seeming, he's as straight as you or I."

Jack Dean chuckled a whistling disbelief, and then stared hard at the chinks of the walls.

"Let's be fair," Signal Sam went on. "If any man has cause to dislike the fellow I suppose it's me; but I don't want to judge him harshly or condemn him without proof. What else did you hear?"

"Nothin', 'cept that there's to be another meetin' to-night, when Adair'll be ready with the plan for drivin' you an' the major out o' the country."

"To-night? Well, I'll be there to hear what the rascals have to say, or take mighty big risks in trying!"

"Thought ye'd want to attend!" rising and buttoning his heavy coat. "That's why I come. And ye kin figger that I'll be a-layin' round some'ers in the shadders, ready to help ye if ye git into any trouble."

"I'd know that without your saying it," Sam assured, pressing his hand warmly. "You can always be depended on to do your part. If I had a few more trusty fellows like you, I'd have nothing to fear from any of their plotting."

And, pleased by the deserved compliment, Dean strode out into the night air, squeaking and chuckling in his ludicrously absurd way.

CHAPTER VII.

CLEVERLY TRAPPED.

SIGNAL Sam sat for a long time in silence after Dean's departure. He then arose, donned some heavy clothing, for the night was chill, and went into the street. The flaring lights of the stores and saloons transformed the night almost into day. It was not yet midnight, and, as Silverton did not retire early, the streets were still thronged.

Making his way among the jostling miners, he reached a point opposite the Placer Palace, and from the dense shadows of a side street noted all that occurred in front of the saloon.

A faint bar of light played against the bald face of the cliff behind the building, issuing, he knew, from the room mentioned by Dean.

"Shouldn't be surprised if some of the scamps are already there," he muttered, working around to a point commanding the window.

The maneuver was of little practical benefit. The window was curtained. The bar of light had come from a narrow opening near the bottom; but this was closed while he stood there wondering what he should do.

"They don't intend to give their snap away!"

For a time he had serious thoughts of climbing to the roof of the porch, as Dean had done. But he abandoned this after a little reflection, and again made his way to the front.

Mingling with the throng at the entrance, he boldly entered the bar-room, smoked a cigar with an acquaintance, and then strolled leisurely about as dozens of others were doing, without any apparent motive save idle curiosity.

"Glad to see you again!" asserted Baldor, with a passing flirt of his cloak.

"Can't say that I return the compliment!" Sam muttered, eying the dwarf uneasily. "You're altogether too spry and knowing."

He greatly feared Baldor might guess his mission, and have steps taken to thwart it; so he watched him with a keen alertness that permitted no motion of the latter to escape attention.

His careless strolling brought him at length to the passage opening on the stairway leading to the upper floor; and, sure no one was heeding him, he glided through this and made his way to the landing.

Here a narrow hall ran the full length of the building, with doors opening into rooms on either side. The room where the plotters were to meet was at the further end, and least easy of access. It was extremely perilous to remain in the passage, however, as the opening of a door might reveal his presence, and if any one mounted the stairway he could scarcely hope to escape detection.

Removing his shoes, he hurried along the corridor until its further end was gained. He could hear voices in murmured conversation in the conference apartment. Applying a key to the

door of the room next it, he hastily entered, and crouched near the wall with ears strained to catch every sound.

There were only two men in the room and they were talking on a variety of topics having no bearing on the question which so nearly interested him. He had scarcely crouched there five minutes when he heard heavy footsteps advancing along the hall. To his surprise and consternation they stopped in front of his door. With bated breath he heard a key turn in the wards of the lock, and realized that in another moment he would be discovered.

Leaping up he looked wildly about for some place in which he might hide until the unwelcome visitor had departed. Along the wall at the back of the room, for this room had no window, was a small clothes-press or closet. Into this he darted, carrying his shoes in his hands, just as the door opened. So nearly simultaneous were the movements that for a moment he felt sure he had been discovered, and held his revolver in readiness to resist an attack should such prove to be the case.

The intruder merely scratched a match, however, and applied it to a small hand lamp on the stand.

"Great peaks!" Signal Sam gasped, peering through a crevice as the sputtering match illuminated the man's face. "It's Kid Adair, as I'm a living sinner! Now, what's he up to?"

The question needed no answer other than that furnished by Adair, who, with the air of a man at home, removed his coat, hung it on a peg against the wall, and donned another.

"Like the idiot I am I've blundered into his room," Sam muttered with a perturbed air. "Ye gods, if he'd wanted to hang that in here it would have placed me in close quarters! I hope there isn't anything in here he'll want for his evening toilet! There'll surely be a muss if there is."

Adair did not tarry long, going out soon after and into the adjoining room. In doing this, he turned the key in the door, a circumstance which Signal Sam thought little of at the time, as he had in his pocket a duplicate of it.

"The boys will soon be around!" said Adair, greeting the occupants of the other room jocularly. "Make yourselves at home till I come back."

Then, with a low laugh, he whispered something to them, and went down-stairs.

The others continued their talk after he had gone, but said nothing to interest the eavesdropper in the least.

Thus five minutes passed away, at the end of which time Sam noticed a strong odor of smoke. Whence it came, or the cause, he could not determine, but so strong was it he felt sure it was in the building.

Still, as the others continued to talk, and seemed not to notice it, he deemed it best to also remain quiet.

A little later, however, he became sure the building was on fire, and was moving toward the door for the purpose of making some investigation, when startled exclamations from the adjoining room showed that the odor had at last reached the talkers, who at once sent up a vigorous alarm of fire.

Throwing the door open, they dashed wildly along the corridor, shouting their alarm at every step, and in such stentorian tones as to leave no doubt the cries were heard and would soon be responded to.

"I'd better get out of here!" Sam exclaimed, knowing that an excited crowd would soon fill the hall and make it impossible to quit the room without detection. "This would be an extremely awkward place to get caught in."

He started in dismay as he applied his key to the lock. Adair, in retreating, had accidentally or intentionally left his key sticking in the opposite side, thus effectually preventing Signal Sam from inserting his. Had he a bent wire he might have thrust Adair's key out; but he had nothing of the kind, and there was not time to make a search for something that would answer the purpose.

A wild tumult had arisen in the room below, men were hurrying excitedly about, and footsteps could already be heard on the stairs. The smoke was increasing in pungency and density, showing that the fire, wherever it might be, was making rapid progress.

Halting in bewilderment, he heard the flames crackling viciously in the apartment which had been deserted only a few minutes before; and a sickening sense of impending disgrace and disaster swept over him.

He realized now that he was the victim of as cunningly laid trap as mortal man had ever fallen into. Adair, on coming into the room had

really discovered him as he whisked into the closet; had left the key in the lock to imprison him; had fired the adjoining apartment at the imminent risk of destroying the Placer; and all for the purpose of casting on Signal Sam the stigma of arson.

It was well known that Signal Sam had no kindly feelings for the saloon or its proprietor, and the belief that he had attempted to burn the place would spread like wild-fire, and probably with very disastrous results, for above all things the people of Silverton hated and despised an incendiary.

"I must get out of here!" gasped the imprisoned man, with despairing wildness.

But how?

The question was not easy to answer. The door could not be unlocked; and, as it opened inward, it could not be readily hurled from its hinges.

Quick as thought, he drew his clasp-knife, and attack the rusty screws which held the hinges in place. One of them was released, and he was turning to the other, when the footsteps he had heard on the stairway entered the long hall. With a despairing cry he dropped the knife, and exerting all his strength pulled the lower portion of the door backward and with a mighty jerk wrenched it from its fastenings.

Then, with eyes flaming fire, revolver drawn and breath coming hot and fast, he sprang through the opening and faced the men in the corridor.

"There he is! There's the fire-bug!" they shouted, recoiling somewhat in their surprise at meeting the supposed incendiary.

"Down with him!" commanded Adair, from the further end of the hall. "Don't let him escape, whoever he is!"

"The fire is in there!" said Sam, with a wonderful evenness and calmness of voice. "If I had started it I shouldn't be in here. Look after it, first, or the building is bound to go. The walls are already hot."

He moved out into the center of the passage, and pointed to the door indicated. His face was as pale as the face of the dead, his eyes glowed like coals, but not a tremor swept through his frame, and so strangely calm and stern was his air that the men shrunk from him as they might have shrunk from a spirit.

"Take him!" screamed Adair, enraged at their hesitation.

"There's the fire," repeated Signal Sam, sternly. "Kid Adair himself or some of his tools started it. I did not. Touch me at your peril. For my acts I am ready to answer to the law."

And with an unflinching air he walked past the cowed fellows, straight down the hall till he came to Adair.

"You're a liar and a scoundrel!" he said, glaring into the gambler's eyes. "And I am responsible for my words, you understand. You'd better look after that fire, now, if you don't want your bell-hole to go up in smoke. As for me, you can find me below within ten minutes, if you want to press those charges."

Saying this, he backed by the astounded, enraged and discomfited gambler, descended the stairway in the same manner, and left the excited men to battle with the flames.

CHAPTER VIII.

HOT WORDS.

VERY few men had retained their usual calm when that wild alarm was sounded; but there were a few, and these stared curiously at Signal Sam as he stalked down the stairway and into the bar-room.

"Tell Kid Adair that if he wishes to see me he can find me on the outside at any time within the next fifteen minutes," he said to one of these, taking out his watch and noting the time.

Then he strode on into the street without vouchsafing a word of explanation.

Confused sounds and shouts came from the rooms above where the men were fighting the threatening flames, and a string of workers had been formed, along which buckets were passing by way of the porch with water to subdue the fire.

"I shall not be overly sorry if the thing goes!" Sam mused, grimly, pacing the while up and down the rough pavement. "The scoundrel fired it with his own hands, and it would serve him right. It will not go, though. He was ready for it, and they'll subdue it directly. Strange what risks a man will sometimes take to get in a blow at an enemy!"

He was right in his guess that the fire would not prove serious, for almost at the same instant the fire-fighters came trooping down-stairs with the statement that the flames were out.

Among them was Kid Adair; and Signal

Sam momentarily expected the gambler to appear outside of the building in search of him.

But nothing of the kind occurred. Adair had a few words with the man to whom Sam had given the message; and, calling some cronies about him, retreated to the further end of the room and became absorbed in conversation.

"He fears to meet me!" Sam gritted, with a low and disagreeable laugh, as he noticed the movement. "His vindictive spirit will not let him rest, though, and he's shaping some other plan to get even. Well, he can look out for himself! I'm determined to stand no fooling. That's one thing certain."

Turning from this momentary survey of the interior of the saloon he found Dean at his elbow.

"A high old time!" Dean squeaked. "Tried to burn ye up, in there, eh?"

"Either that, or to make it seem that I fired the building. Adair is up to something else, I suppose, as that failed."

"I've been watching him!" the honest fellow assured. "He's talkin' ag'in' ye like a steam engine. Don't jist know what he's up to, though."

"I told him I'd wait out here fifteen minutes," said Sam, again looking at his watch. "The time's up long ago, and it's plain he don't intend to come out. I sha'n't wait any longer. You'll stay around here, of course. If matters begin to look squally, you know where I'm to be found. There'll be no meeting of the gang to-night; and if there should be it wouldn't be possible, now, for me to get within hearing of it. So I'm going home!"

"Too square a chap to fight these rascals!" wheezed the horny-handed, as Sam disappeared in the gloom. "As brave as a lion, but he won't and couldn't stoop to sich dirty sort of work as they're a-stoopin' to ever' blessed minute. You bet, I'll watch 'um! An' if they go to play off any o' their dirty work to-night, they'll find 'at Signal Sam's got one friend in the crowd, anyhow!"

Saying this, he turned into the saloon; and, joining a group of acquaintances seemed oblivious of everything save the jesting stream of talk they indulged in. But his eyes noted all that was transpiring and his ears drank in every sound emanating from the corner where Kid Adair and his friends had ensconced themselves.

The result of their discussion was soon apparent. One of them moved carelessly toward the door, where he stood a moment, puffing lazily at a cigar. Having ascertained that Signal Sam had grown tired of waiting and had departed he communicated the gratifying intelligence to Kid Adair. Whereupon that worthy mounted a chair and called for silence.

"Gents," he said, wiping his mouth impressively with his silk handkerchief, "the time for action in this matter has come. It is a crime that we ought not and cannot afford to let pass without action."

"Time for me to git out o' hyer, too!" muttered Dean, slipping unobserved among the throng at the entrance. "If Sam hain't wanted at this identical minute, then he'll never be wanted."

Nevertheless, having gained the outside, he could not resist the temptation to remain awhile and learn what Adair had to say; so he crouched in the thick shadows and strained his ears for the words that were falling from the gambler's lips.

Adair was hastily sketching the origin of the fire; but, not ready for the denouement, had so far mentioned no name.

But it came, even as Dean waited:

"And this scoundrel—this incendiary—this fire-bug, who, through hatred and malice, fired the place! It is hardly necessary for me to tell you who he is. You know him as well as I do. His name is Sam Holcomb, commonly called Signal Sam—as great a rascal as ever walked the earth!"

"Which is a rotted lie, you villain!" Dean squeaked from his place of concealment.

The denial was not uttered in a tone loud enough to reach any within the room, and Adair went on with his fierce denunciations of the absent man. His words were greeted with loud yells by the gamblers and those who had most cause for enmity against the accused. If Sam had any friends in the angered crowd they maintained a discreet and virtuous silence. Dean, noting all that was occurring, set it down that he had none there.

"Must dig out o' this!" in his queer, whistling voice. "He's making madmen and lunatics out o' them fellers. 'Twon't be a half an hour tell the whole b'ilin' of 'um'll be jist a-rompin' and a-stavin' to git at Sam. An' if they do, while they're in that notion an' filled full of Kid

Adair's p'izenest whisky, they'll not be satisfied 'less they fills him full o' holes or strings him to the nearest tree."

With this thought as a stimulus, he stole from his hiding-place and sped swiftly toward Sam's abode.

The streets were now almost silent and deserted. Some of the rivals of the Placer Palace were yet in full blast, but the lights had vanished from the business houses and residences. Few were awake, except the excited and drunken horde at Adair's; and it was, therefore, a time most favorable for the accomplishment of dark and evil deeds.

"Git up!" Dean wheezed, pounding vigorously on the door of Sam's modest, bachelor residence. "The devil is unchained, and his name is Kid Adair."

The summons was almost immediately responded to, for Sam, giving over to moody thought, had not retired.

"It's jist as I say!" Dean cried, in answer to his hurried queries. "They're organizin' ag'in' ye, at the Placer; and I shouldn't be s'prised to see 'em b'ilin' down the street at any minute with pistols and ropes."

Holcomb turned back, strapped a belt of revolvers to his waist, and followed without another word.

When they reached the saloon, Adair was still talking.

"Stay behind, and don't appear unless you see that it's absolutely necessary. I don't want them to know that you warned me. You can serve me better in the future if that is not known!"

And with this injunction, he pushed his way through the doorway and boldly entered the bar-room.

Adair turned pale as he saw him enter; but immediately collected his courage, and cried out, sharply:

"There he is, now, gentlemen! We shall not have to go searching over the country for him."

"Which you wouldn't have to do at any time. No one knows that better than you, Kid Adair. I know what your charges are, and I brand them as the falsehoods of a detestable villain. If there was a spark of manhood or honor about you, you wouldn't try to set the people of this town against me as you are doing."

"But, of one thing rest assured. I don't fear you nor your allies. When you say I started the fire, you lie!"

With revolvers drawn for instant use he leaped to the top of a box near the entrance and asked for attention.

Adair was turning white and red by turns, but, being at heart an arrant coward, cringed and hesitated before those drawn weapons, one of which seemed threatening him. As for the men who had been but a moment before clamorous for the blood of Signal Sam, they huddled together, like sheep deprived of a leader, not knowing what to do.

Taking advantage of this lull, Holcomb launched into a torrent-like speech, explanatory of the circumstances which had been urged as proof of his guilt.

The murmurs of the gamblers soon grew into a roar, however, and he saw that deadly peril portended. Still, he faced them and coolly went on with his explanations, waving his ready revolvers occasionally by way of emphasis.

Then, like the lashing of heavy surf, the roar increased to a howl, and the bravest of the gamblers pushed themselves toward him. Two went down under the strokes of his hurled revolvers. But the others came on, and what the result might have been cannot be known, for Jack Dean reached a long and muscular arm from the shadows of the doorway and dragged his fearless and pugnacious friend into the street.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BIG BONANZA.

"SCOOT!" Dean squeaked. "They're a-comin' fer ye like a nest of bald hornets! 'Tain't no time fer argifyin'. You don't want to, I know, but you've got to er go under. They've got it in fur ye, this time, and no mistake."

Vexed as Sam was at this kind of treatment, and at the thought of retreating from the gambler's minions, he realized that Dean had taken the only wise course out of the difficulty; and so permitted himself to be drawn back into the shadows and away from the dangerous vicinity.

As they vanished, the maddened gamblers, with Adair at their head, streamed through the doorway like a living tide, and spread over the street in a hasty search.

This was gall and wormwood to Sam, but he followed Dean doggedly, and they were soon at the home of Major Glenwood.

Arousing the major and acquainting him with what was occurring, Dean hastened away, and Sam accompanied Glenwood into the snug little parlor.

Glenwood was of the opinion that Adair's force would visit the place soon, and it was, therefore, a great relief when Dean returned with a dozen stalwart miners at his heels—men who were in the major's employ and friendly to his interest.

"If we haf' to fight, we'll do it in a way to be re-elected!" Dean squeaked, rubbing his hands in gleeful anticipation.

But, no fight occurred. Day was at hand. The sun was already gilding the splintered peaks, and would soon illuminate the valleys and canyons, and men with Kid Adair's instincts are like beasts of prey in their fear and hatred of the light.

Discovering that Holcomb had taken refuge at Major Glenwood's, and knowing the major would not give him up without a fight, they dispersed, with the understanding that the matter had not ended but would be renewed on the following night, or as soon as a favorable opportunity presented.

The coming of day and the evaporation of the maddening brandy fumes placed things in a new light, however, and many who were wildest and fiercest in their support of Kid Adair withdrew from him their countenance.

Sam had hosts of friends; and these, as soon as they understood what had taken place, and were informed of Adair's intentions, ranged themselves on his side, vowing that if worst came to worst, and Adair continued to push the matter, they would wipe out the Placer Palace and drive every gambler from the town.

This may have had more influence in quieting the belligerent element than anything else, for it reached Adair, as he sat in consultation with friends and adherents, and cast a shade of uneasiness and gloom over their subsequent deliberations.

Before many hours had elapsed the little town became an armed camp and every man a walking arsenal. But the day passed without an outbreak; and by nightfall affairs had apparently resumed their normal condition.

Signal Sam and Jack Dean managed to obtain some much-needed sleep that afternoon, and when night again settled upon the earth they were seemingly as fresh and vigorous as if the exciting scenes of the Placer Palace had been only a fleeting dream.

The fact could no longer be concealed from the gambling fraternity that Jack Dean was the friend and champion of Signal Sam. In truth, no further attempt was made to keep it a secret. Nevertheless, the sturdy miner, fearing not the face of clay, went boldly to the Placer at his customary hour.

He was greeted with a cloud of scowls, and matters made so uncomfortable for him that he retreated, after remaining determinedly at his post a full hour.

Others of Sam's friends, who were not likely to be suspected as spies, took up the the task dropped by the horny-handed, and the circle of friends which grouped about the major as about a leader, were kept fully posted regarding all that transpired.

When the night was well advanced, and it became certain no movement was contemplated by Kid Adair, Holcomb, made restless and nervous by the long strain on mind and body, strode out into the crisp air, and took his way thoughtfully up the mountain-slope.

It seemed a blessed relief to leave behind the turmoil and heart-ache and worry of the frenzied town and get out into the pure air of heaven, blowing so coolly sweet across the rugged brow of the mountain. The peaceful influence of the unchanging, starry expanse sunk into his soul like a divine benediction, and a peace he had not felt for weary months permeated his entire being.

On that craggy slope, upheaved by the fires that shaped the plastic globe, with the cool wind laving his fevered face and the arching skies whispering of the immutability of God, how pitifully insignificant appeared the acts and passions that rend men and drive them to madness and despair!

With these thoughts impressing themselves on his awakened fancy he fell into a deep sleep, from which he did not arouse till long after day.

The peace and quiet of the place had followed him through his dreams; as he looked at the town beneath his feet, and thought of the per-

plexities that awaited his return, a wish that he did not have to go back swept over him.

In this frame of mind he loitered, strolling leisurely about, watching the occasional flight of a bird, and tossing a piece of stone now and then, merely to see it bound from one projection to another until stopped by some boulder or lost in the distance.

Suddenly, as he picked up one of these detached pieces, which was somewhat larger than the others, he started, glanced at it inquisitively; then broke it in two with another stone.

"Silver!" he exclaimed, panting from the excess of his excitement. "The richest ore I've seen in many a day!"

Gone were the quiet fancies conjured by the night. Gone the placid calm so lately his. In its place the fierce frenzy which seizes and maddens those who come suddenly and unexpectedly on indications of boundless wealth which may be had for the seeking. It is the same feverish impulse that drives men to lonely delving on almost inaccessible mountain slopes, to lives of deprivation and isolation, and too frequently to untimely and miserable deaths.

"There's more where that came from!" he whispered hoarsely, his kindling eyes wandering wistfully up and down the slope. "And if I can find it, my fortune is made."

He arose to his feet, half staggering, so great was his nervous anxiety, and began a wild search for the vein from which he knew the specimen had come. He was an expert in this kind of work, and as soon as he could calm himself sufficiently to think clearly, he began to make some headway.

It was a long and wearisome task, tracing to the fountain head that detached mass of mineral. It was done by scrutinizing and closely examining every pebble and stone which appeared to be of kindred nature, and keeping to the track which was thus outlined up the mountain, for that they had come down from greater heights was as certain as that the law of gravitation had been in force when they began their wanderings in those dim and distant ages when the mountains were upheaved from the sea.

Fatigue, pain, everything was forgotten in that absorbing search; and the sun was sinking toward the western peaks when it ended.

But, Sam had accomplished his purpose. The wonderful vein had been located; its finder could now call himself a rich man; and that famous mine, THE BIG BONANZA, was about to dazzle and blind a greedy world.

CHAPTER X.

SILVERY DREAMS.

SAM HOLCOMB'S hands trembled as he staked his claim and placed in position the regulation notice stating its metes and bounds. Like nearly all the mines in that region, it was what is known as a fissure vein, extending vertically into the mountain wall to unknown depths, and perhaps through it. The seam of silver-bearing rock was not wide, but it was richer in silver than any he had seen in many a day, and if proper machinery could be had to work it, the yield would be marvelous.

"It will be a big job to get even a small stamp-mill here!" he thought, making a guess at the ounces the ore would go to the ton if properly treated. "It will have to be a stamp-mill!"

By this he meant that the ore did not have a sufficient quantity of lead to make the smelting process advisable, and that it would have to be crushed, and the silver separated from the baser matter by quicksilver in amalgamating pans.

"But we'll do it. There's been as heavy machinery brought over the mountains already. It will take a mint of money, though, and that's what I haven't got; and I'm not going to let any sharp get a grip on the thing by loaning me money, if I can help it. I'll take in Glenwood as a partner. I don't know how much cash he has, but whatever it is it will have to do. We can start rather humbly at first, and when the work is well under way we can soon get all the money we may need."

So roseate was the picture his fancy was painting, that the successes of the future seemed accomplished facts, and all herculean efforts easy.

With throbbing pulses and teeming brain he hurried down the long and precipitous slopes, forgetful of the perilous and exciting events through which he had recently passed. When he reached Silverton the sun was setting behind the western ranges.

"What's up, now, and where have you been all day?" Glenwood questioned, noticing his haggard, flushed and agitated air. "You have cost us a good deal of worry to-day. We didn't know but some of Adair's satellites had met you

out somewhere and added murder to the list of their crimes."

"Nothing of the kind!" with an attempt at ease. "Come into the house, major; I want to speak to you on a matter of importance."

"But you haven't had anything to eat!" Glenwood protested. "You look half sick, too."

"I'm all right, I assure you; and not in the least hungry."

And Signal Sam grasped the major's hand and pushed him through the doorway.

"Look at that!" he cried, hoarsely, extending a bit of the ore. "What do you think of it? I know where there's a mountain full of that; and it's never been touched by drill or pick."

The major's eyes expanded in gratified surprise.

"Then you're the most fortunate man in the San Juan!" he returned, quietly.

"A man with the backing of a mine like that need have no fear of Kid Adair!" he continued, a moment later.

Signal Sam's face clouded. He had almost forgotten Adair's existence.

"They've been making the most they could of your absence," as he observed the perturbed look. "Have been trying to make people believe you had left the country secretly; and that that act was an acknowledgment of guilt."

"I'm a fool!" Sam declared. "I never once thought of that. I could have been at home five hours ago, as well as now."

"And might have missed discovering that vein," said the major. "They haven't accomplished much, I think, though they've certainly tried hard enough. They've held secret meetings innumerable and endeavored to fire the town against you; but as luck would have it, we've been able to place spies at every meeting. So we have met them at every point; and they've not advanced much since yesterday."

"The hardest thing we had to fight was your unexplainable absence. Dean is a jewel. He told a lot of lies, I suspect; and thus managed to satisfy the doubters. If we'd had any earthly idea where you were we should have sent for you."

Signal Sam was overwhelmed with emotions of gratitude. While he was lolling on the mountain slopes, or feverishly hunting for the marvelous fissure, those faithful friends had been sturdily fighting his battles and refuting the calumnies heaped on him.

"I can never repay you!" he declared. "Half of the mine is yours, if you will accept it."

"Tut! Tut! You're crazy!"

"Not a bit! If you won't have it that way, then I'll make over a fourth of it to you and a fourth to Jack Dean. Don't say 'no,' till you've heard me out."

"You'll admit that Dean deserves something handsome for his fidelity and energy. That settles that point. If you don't want to take your fourth as a gift, consider it a loan. Or, if you like that better, you can call it purchase money paid for a fourth interest in the Big Bonanza, for that's what I've settled on for a name."

The major began a vigorous protest, but Sam poured out such a flood of words that the protest was almost unheard. Logic, eloquence, wit—all the resources at his command were brought to bear to break down and override the major's objections. The latter's self-interest, and man's natural love of wealth and the power it confers was likewise appealed to and all dished up in so plausible and tempting a way that one must have had more than Spartan resolution to resist.

The major did not resist; and an hour later Dean was called in, and the Big Bonanza Mining Company held its first meeting.

The next morning the trio visited the place where the fissure had been uncovered; staked additional claims for Dean and Glenwood, all of which were to be consolidated into one mine; and returned to the town to spread the news of the great discovery.

Within two hours thereafter, the slopes of the mountain were bristling with stakes and honey-combed with prospect-holes, every one of which, the fond dreamers anticipated, would quickly develop into another Bonanza.

A little daily had been started in the town about a month previous, and in its issue of the following day it gave up its columns to a description of the wonderful find; and to a eulogy of the company which had been organized to work it.

"The dreams of Cortez, Pizarro and Coronado did not compass in their wildest flights the actual wealth which was yesterday revealed to the astonished gaze of the people of Silverton,"

declared the editor, in ecstatic rapture.

"To be appreciated it must be seen. What the discovery means for Silverton we will not attempt to say. Prophecy lies prostrate in its contemplation; and the wings of fancy flutter helplessly in trying to picture it. Of one thing, however, we are sure: The company, composed of such honorable men, such indefatigable rustlers, as Major Glenwood and the Hons. Samuel Holcomb and Jack Dean, will use every means to develop the rich lead. These gentlemen are well known to every man, woman and child in Silverton, and are equally admired and respected. Therefore we rejoice in this, their great good fortune, knowing that in enriching themselves they will be enriching our city, and add to the glory of Colorado."

The sentences might have been a little smoother and the metaphors less mixed, but the effect could not have been better. Every word referring to the Big Bonanza was read with avidity by the excited citizens; and the editor's laudations, together with the wealth now supposed to be theirs, caused them to be admired, envied and feared, and conferred on them a power and influence wielded by few other men in the camp.

Tradesmen fawned on them, speculators and money-lenders haunted their footsteps, those previously regarding themselves as their superiors became patronizingly gracious, and all joined in that respectful homage bestowed on successful men. As for Jack Dean, he became the object of much solicitation on the part of the gambling fraternity, who hoped to draw his money from him as fast as it was obtained, through his love of liquor and gaming.

To the surprise of all, however, he avoided their entanglements and seductive blandishments, refusing to even celebrate his good fortune in a bumper with old-time friends and cronies. He had given a solemn promise, on being admitted to membership in the Big Bonanza Company, that he would avoid these things; and was manfully resolved to keep his promise.

The trouble of the preceding days was apparently forgotten by the populace, which is, if possible, more fickle in mining-camps than elsewhere. Kid Adair and his allies became as mute as it was possible for such men to be; and whatever plans they had formulated were held in abeyance.

And thus the roseate days sped; and the members of the Bonanza Company laid their plans and pushed their workmen into the heart of the mountain.

In these fissure veins it is customary to open a horizontal tunnel beneath the lode; then drill and blast the quartz from above. From thence it drops into the tunnel, and is brought to the surface by means of tram cars.

Signal Sam thought much of Grace Glenwood during those prosperous days. Being frequently at her father's residence, where matters of moment were discussed at rapidly recurring intervals, he had abundant opportunities for seeing her and dwelling on the beauty of her features and the music of her voice.

She greeted him always with a modest reserve, and Sam, being a timid man where ladies were concerned, knew not how to construe this attitude. Although he had visited her a number of times in a lover-like way, he had never ventured to speak of the subject that lay nearest his heart; and, since her rescue from the torrent by Lucky George, he had considered his chances hopeless and endeavored to wean his heart from its affection.

He had not succeeded; and the turn of the tide in his favor caused new hope to spring up in his breast. Not that he supposed she would be influenced by mercenary motives! He never sullied his regard with such a thought. But the fact that he was now the equal, even the superior of her father in financial standing, gave him courage to press his suit.

And so it came about that, with her father's consent, he renewed his visits; and was received with a sweet and womanly graciousness that speedily banished reserve and filled his mind with fond anticipations.

CHAPTER XI.

"TWO AND TWO ARE THREE."

"ARRAH, now! Will ye leave me alone, Jack Dean?"

Peggy Shields retreated in some confusion, took refuge behind the kitchen table, and flourished a stick of stove-wood as a marshal might flourish his baton.

"Well, then, I won't!" Jack asserted in his squeaky voice, making a feint as if to pass around the table, and catching her as she ran.

"Why should I?" giving her a squeeze and a kiss. "Of course I won't let ye alone; an' ye needn't ask me. The ideoar!"

Peggy struggled and pouted, as in duty bound, and then yielded herself to his embraces. "Ye've got to kape the min at a distare," she had frequently and confidentially assured her mistress, and it may be she was practicing her theory on Jack.

"What was it I was sayin'?" whistled Dean. "I declare ye plum made me fergit! Women air sich pesky critters—tarnally worrin' the life out of a feller. Dingied if I haint a notion to swear off comin' hyer any more!"

"Wusht you would," and Peggy gave her nose one of those alarming and characteristic tilts skyward. "Deary me, I o'y wusht ye would. But I know you won't. Steam engines couldn't kape ye away!"

"Dingied if I b'lieve they could, either!" and Dean gave her another hug. "Jut what was it I was a-sayin'?"

"Oh, yes! I recollect now I was a-sayin' that Lucky George called on the mistress, this evenin', and a-askin' ye if ye knowed how the two was gittin' along. Ye don't, I'll be bound!"

"That I don't! Do ye think I'm a w'asel, Jack Dean, to go peekin' in' pryin' into other p'aples bizness? Well, then I ain't."

"Av he calls on her or don't call on her, ain't anny affair of mine. It do be nip and tuck, though, I'm thinkin', betune him and Mr. Sam."

"You're a worrit; that's what ye air!" Dean squeaked, in his mouse-like tones. "Every woman is a born worrit. That's what makes half the trouble in this world. And that's what makes things so mighty uncertain with these other folks. Miss Glenwood is a worrit!"

With this philosophical conclusion, Dean relaxed his grasp and assisted her to a chair.

"If women could on'y be sens'ble like men, now, what a world this'd be. Couldn't be another ekal if, I don't suppose. But they jist can't; and they ain't no use talkin' 'bout it er expectin' 'em to. Ever' time ye expect 'em to ye git left!"

And he heaved a sigh that shook his massive frame.

"Thank ye fer nothin'; not aven fer yer good opinion av me sex!" retorted Miss Shields. "Av women be sich worrits as ye say, why don't ye go along thin, and l'ave me alone?"

"Can't!" declared Jack, folding his hands solemnly. "Dingied if I don't wisht I could!"

"But, I say, Peggy!" lowering his voice to a confidential wheeze. "They ain't any use o' you an' me fightin'. We'd be jist boun' to make up an' be better friends inside o' ten minutes, anyhow. I want ye to tell me somethin' 'bout Lucky George. Needn't pertend ye don't know nothin', fer I know ye do! Haint ever' thing goin' right with that chap at this place, and I'm certain of it."

"I seen him come away from hyer, this evenin', as I said; and his face was that white and dead-like it made me shiver. They's been a bu'st-up betwixt them two."

Peggy opened her eyes a little at this, but did not venture an expression.

"Men don't look that white about the gills 'less they're mortal sick or have had some kind of a set down. It's the same look I've seen on the faces o' gamblers when they'd played their last dollar an' lost. Not a purty look, Peggy, ner a pleasant 'un, I kin tell ye!"

"Do ye s'pose he axed her, thin?" Miss Shields questioned, with pardonable curiosity.

"That's jist what I s'pose. He asked her, this blessed evenin'. If he didn't you kin take my head for a football."

"An' a tinty, little wan it be, too!" she asserted, with playful roguishness.

"Big enough to hold two or three thimblefuls o' sense, anyhow!" Dean retorted. "Which is more'n I kin say fer yourn, Peggy."

"But that ain't neither hyer ner there! I thought ye might know somethin' 'bout that bizness, seein' 't you're around the house all the time."

"And I tould ye I don't! Wid me it's all guess-work."

"Go on an' guess a little, then," said Dean, good-humoredly. "I'll bet ye kin guess nearer the mark than anybody."

"Well, then, if he axed her the night, she said no."

"Kin do that well myself!" was the squeaking reply. "Of course she did. Otherwise he wouldn't 'a' looked that way."

"And she done that, Jack, 'cause she thinks more of Sam Holcomb'n she do av this feller. Is yer brain big enough to understand that? If't wor Sam as had axed her she wouldn't threatened him so. Put that in yer pipe, ye dull pate!"

"Sure of that, air ye, Peggy?" Dean quizzed,

with a sort of ecstatic delight. "Ding! I wisht I dared say that to Sam."

"An' why can't ye say it, if ye want to?"

"Why—why—ye see it mightn't turn out jist that-away; and if he should make bold to speak right out to her and she didn't answer as ye think—w'y, the ding fool'd go right out an' put a bullet into himself. That's all the sense he's got."

"If min could on'y be sensible like women!" cried Peggy, again tilting her nose as she thus deftly turned the tables on him. "Av they on'y could, what a worl' this'd be, to be sure."

"Ding!" said Jack. "You're sharper'n a steel-trap! I'll haf' to kiss ye ag'in fer that; I swear I will."

And he did, with a report that made the dishes rattle in the cup-board.

"And you're cert'in 't if Sam'd ask her a question like what we believe Lucky George did to-night, that she'd give him a diffrent answer frum what she give him?" when he had again slipped into the depths of his easy-chair. "Think about it, Peggy! Air ye sure?"

"An' has Mr. Holcomb sint ye here to-night to ax thim questions? Av I thought he had I wouldn't answer a wan."

"Well, he haint, then!" Dean protested. "If he knowed what I've been a-sayin' this blessed evenin' he'd put a ball through me the fu'st time we met. You don't know Signal Sam, Peggy, or you wouldn't 'a' asked that."

"I didn't know," said Peggy, tossing her head. "Min air all worrits and quare-critters. And I oughtn't to answer ye, I s'pose, but I will. I don't know nothin'. You'll belave that, o' coorse; ye're allus belavin' that. But I've me opinions, as anny woman has a right to."

Dean nodded his head in ludicrous assent.

"Of coorse!"

"And me guessin' don't amount to much. But I can put two an' two thegither an' make four out av thim. And what I make out is that the field's open to Mr. Sam Holcomb, av he's got sinse enough to walk into it."

Again Dean nodded.

"Bleeged to you. 'Deed I am! But I kin beat ye on yer 'rithmetic, Peggy. Two an' two don't allus make four. Not by a long shot they don't. Frinstance, to take cases we kinder understand: Hyer's you and me. That's two. After awhile, when we git married, we'll on'y be one. And there's Lucky George and Miss Grace. They're two; an' 'cordin' to yer own showin', they'll allus remain two. So, in that instance, Peggy, two an' two makes three!"

And, with another kiss, he picked up his hat and stalked from the kitchen.

CHAPTER XII.

THE TURN OF THE TIDE.

BEFORE the tunnel had been pushed very far into the mountain, measures were taken for bringing over the divides the stamp-mill necessary to the successful working of the mine. The expense would be very considerable; and in order to obtain the necessary funds the major applied to a number of personal friends for small loans to eke out the deficit.

As the hills were infested with road-agents, it was deemed advisable to dispatch a secret messenger with the money. The mill was to be bought at Pueblo, where mills of the kind wanted were kept; the kind wanted being built in sections small enough for burro transportation. Other men of Silverton desired to send money to the same point for various articles, and it was arranged for the one messenger to carry all.

However, after some thought and consultation, it was decided to send two, so that there would be a better chance for defense in case of an attack.

All the arrangements were perfected with such secrecy that it was not deemed possible the plans could be known outside of the little circle interested; and in the darkness preceding the gray of a perfect June morning, the messengers set out, mounted on a pair of the best burros procurable.

Ten miles out from the town, while crawling around a ledge so narrow that it was impossible to turn on it, they were halted by two Winchesters, the threatening brown muzzles of which were poked around a bend in the trail just ahead.

"Get down from there!" came the harsh command, in tones which were evidently disguised. "Get down, or we'll tumble you and the burros into the canyon!"

The messengers had been selected for their fighting grit as much as anything else, and were

consequently not at all the men to relish this sort of thing.

"Go to thunder!" the foremost yelled, whipping out a revolver and blazing away at the point where the Winchesters showed. "We don't git down 'less'n we're knocked down!"

The answer was a pair of shots, seeming but one, that stretched the burros, quivering and lifeless masses, on the dangerous ledge, from which it appeared certain they must tumble the next instant.

Another shot killed the defiant messenger, whose companion, seeing that a further effort at defense meant death, threw up his hands and sung out lustily to the effect that he surrendered.

"It's time you were thinking so!" cried the concealed marksman who had spoken before, stepping from behind the spur and lowering the hammer of his rifle. "Just about another second and it would have been too late. Now, dump that money or we'll tumble you down there!" pointing into the black depths.

The messenger was a shrewd and quick-witted fellow, and as the road-agent talked he hearkened closely to the voice. There could be no doubt that it was disguised, he decided.

"Better toss him over, anyhow, hadn't we?" the second road-agent questioned, with brutal harshness, as he joined his comrade.

The messenger started.

This voice was likewise disguised, but the disguise was not so perfect as that of the first. In fact, he felt sure he had heard it before. There was a squeak in it that convinced him beyond all caviling that the man was Jack Dean; and as he surveyed the awkward form and noticed the shambling gait, his suspicions grew into certainties.

"Dump your valuables!" growled the other, angered by his silence and inaction. "If you don't hurry, we'll dump you!"

"This feller must be Signal Sam," he thought. "Him and Dean air allus together, lately. I can't make his voice out so plain, but it's him, I know."

"Dump him?" queried the second road-agent, swinging his revolver forward. "Better, I think! Dead men don't tell any tales."

"No! No!" cried the messenger, with decisive promptness. "I'll shell out!"

He drew a leathern wallet from his breast and tossed it on the rocks.

"They ain't no argiment like a shooter," grinned road-agent No. 2, whom the messenger had set down as Jack Dean. "I allus says they ain't; an' they ain't!"

"Can't be a possible mistake!" thought the messenger, drinking in the tones. "Seems to me I c'u'd swear to that voice. An' if that's Dean, t'other's Sam Holcomb. Haint no two ways 'bout that. Now, what air they playin' this kind of a game for?"

The first road-agent was examining the wallet thrown down, and the other was standing with weapon ready, fearful their prisoner might turn the tables on them.

"Not a bad haul!" exclaimed the examiner, when he had also gone through the wallet of the dead man. "Don't pick up that much of the yellow dust every day. Pity we had to down this chap! But he would have it, and there wasn't time to fool away in talk."

"No," said the other, with that queer squeak which reminded the listener so much of Dean. "An' he was too ding handy with that gun o' his'n. 'Twas him er us, an' so he got it."

"Yes; he got it! We'll leave him here for his friends to pick up. These burros cught to go over the cliff. They're heavy, though, and the chaps that come after the body can attend to that. We've got what we came for, and had better be going."

He arose, thrust the heavy wallets into the pockets of his coat, and turned to his comrade.

"Throw down yer weepion," commanded the second road-agent. "Toss it this way. Ye kin git it after we're gone. Ye might take a shot at us while we're a-skedaddlin', ye know, an' we don't keer about takin' resks."

The messenger did as commanded, and the road-agents backed up the ledge in the direction from which they had appeared.

"Poor Tom!" groaned the messenger, when those unwelcome callers had taken themselves off. "Nobody'd 'a' dreamed a few minutes ago that you was to go over the divide so sudden. But I'll say for ye ye died game."

A great tear coursed down his cheek as he stood looking silently into the dead face.

"And to think that 'twas done by some o' them as started you on this trip. Devils in human form, them is!"

Then he began to question within himself why

Signal Sam and Jack Dean should do this crime, taking it for granted they were the guilty ones.

"On'y one reason," he muttered, his head bowed in thought. "On'y one reason; but hit's as good as a dozen, ef they was all made to order."

He felt sure neither Signal Sam nor Jack Dean had any money of their own. That is, any considerable sum. The money forwarded to pay for the stamp mill and other machinery was furnished by the major; and the other money intrusted to the charge of the messengers belonged to various business men of the camp.

With this as a premise, it was easy, so he imagined, to account for the part which had just been played by Dean and Holcomb.

"By holdin' of us up they're jist that many thousand ahead. It may stop bizness at the Bonanza fer a little while, but what's that when you think of the haul they've made to-night? Nothin' 'tall. Not a drop in the bucket! The major 'll rustle 'round and raise another pile in course o' time, and then everything 'll go on ag'in as if nothin' hadn't happened. And Sam and Jack kin jist lay back and laugh fit to kill, and the people never suspicionin' them."

"Wouldn't never thought o' them, myself, if I hadn't rec'nized their voices. But that squeal o' Dean's is a dead give away. Seems to me I'd know it anywhere."

"An', now, I must be gittin' back! Law! I hate most p'izen bad to haf' to kerry sich a bit o' news. It'll wake up the sleepers, too, I'm thinkin'! There'll be a high old ruction, or I miss my guess."

With this reflection, he picked up the revolver he had tossed away at the command of the road-agent, gave a parting glance at his dead comrade and the bodies of the slain burros, and took his backward way along the ledge in the direction of Silverton.

It was past noon when he arrived there; and, fearing that Signal Sam and Jack Dean might have reached the place and would take the alarm if he was at all incautious, he sneaked in by way of some side alleys, going directly to the residence of the major.

No more astounded man ever lived than was Major John Glenwood, when the messenger presented himself and told his story. Nevertheless, he did not believe a word of the accusations.

"I knowed you wouldn't!" the messenger declared. "But I felt it was my duty to tell you first of all."

"But you're not going to tell others?" Glenwood gasped.

"Hain't I? That shows 'at you don't know me, Major Glenwood. Tell it? I on'y wisht 'at I had a trumpet. I'd fairly make the hills ring with the story. I should haf' to hate myself the longest day I lived, if I didn't tell it. That dead face a-layin' on the ledge up there would ha'nt me forever. Tell it? Course I'll tell it!"

In vain the major argued and entreated. The man was obdurate. He was fully convinced of the truth of the charge he proposed to make; and so confident that he had marked out the true line of duty that nothing could shake him.

And the worst of it was, Signal Sam and Jack Dean had gone into the mountains that very morning on a deer-hunt. With the messenger's almost positive assertions this gave matters a very black look.

Glenwood at last wrung from the man the promise of an hour's delay; and dispatched runners into the hills in search of the absent men.

The hour passed, and they did not return.

"Can't wait any longer!" the messenger cried doggedly. "Tain't jist to Tom. The coyotes may be tearin' at him, now. And 'tain't jist to the other men that trusted their money with me."

And, with this, he stalked determinedly from the house.

The major followed; and when the man made his statement to the various persons who met and questioned him as to the cause of his return, the major put in a prompt denial on behalf of Sam and Dean and urged that judgment be suspended until the facts could be more fully known.

Bad news travels on the wings of the wind; and a half-hour later, a maddened throng had possession of the principal street and howled defiance at the major and threats against his friends.

A party, under the guidance of the messenger, was organized for the purpose of visiting the ledge and bringing in the body of the slain man and the accouterments of the animals.

On reaching the ledge they made a search of the neighborhood for evidence tending to show

who the guilty parties really were; and stumbled wholly by accident as it seemed on a handkerchief marked with Holcomb's initials, and which was promptly identified as his.

And when they returned to the town with the body, bringing also this witness of the guilt of the accused men, passion ran riot and murderous instincts sprung up into the hearts of the citizens.

The major and the few who still believed with him used their utmost endeavors to allay the fierce fever that was turning the heads of even the best citizens, and transforming the unorganized rabble into a horde of wild beasts.

Almost every mining-camp has witnessed similar blind excitements. They have even disgraced old communities which boasted of wise, cool heads and sober judgment. Nothing is so unreasonable, so fanatical, so unbridled in its desire for blood as one of these mobs.

"God help them!" groaned Glenwood, thinking of the men who were thus threatened. "God help them, when they return! We can not!"

CHAPTER XIII.

WOMAN'S WIT.

As night came on the little knots of men at the street corners dispersed. But the saloons overflowed; and there was much wild talk among the vicious element which acknowledged the sway of Kid Adair and his gamblers. It seemed taken for granted that the accused had left the country, having in some way unexplained obtained information that the murder and robbery had been traced home to them.

Outside, a few men patrolled the passes and gorges, moving with a quiet, determined air that boded ill to Dean and Signal Sam should they fall into their hands.

The night was dark and gloomy, with a suggestion of rain which developed occasionally into a misty, sticky fog. On the surrounding slopes and far up the mountain-sides points of light gleamed, now and then, like stars, or glowed like fiery, red eyes, showing where the various mines and finds were located that were being worked by night shifts. Then, the mist would shut down again and all would become as dark as concentrated gloom could make it.

"I can't understand what keeps them away so long!" thought Glenwood, moving uneasily up and down the narrow limits of his apartments. "They must have gone further than they intended. They said they would return by sundown, at the latest."

He looked at the face of his watch almost incessantly, and was so nervous he could scarcely remain still an instant.

Suddenly he turned toward the door. A light step had attracted his attention. The step was followed by a gentle tap; and the door being cautiously opened, Baldor, the dwarf, glided in, his fingers on his lips.

The pigmy had discarded his scarlet cloak, and was arrayed in garments as sober as those affected by the most ordinary citizen.

"Hush!" he whispered, sinking into a chair. "Turn down the light a little. It would be as much as my life is worth to be caught here, now."

The major stared at him strangely. He had never looked on Baldor with favor, regarding him as little more than the spy and tool of Kid Adair and his ilk.

"Turn down the light!" Baldor whispered, motioning his hands impatiently. "I tell you I don't want to take any chances on being seen here."

So imperious was the gesture that the major mechanically obeyed.

"Now what do you want?" he questioned, turning on the diminutive intruder.

"Just this. They've got your friends; and unless we can do something pretty quick, it won't be any use to do anything at all."

Glenwood started as if stung.

"I haven't time to explain," Baldor went on, noticing the look that was so full of the poison of distrust. "You can believe me, though, with perfect safety. Every word I'm speaking is true. It isn't Adair's men that have them. Adair and his set don't know anything about it. Who they are, I can't say; but that they mean mischief I know."

He rattled on at breathless speed, his tone and manner convincing Glenwood that, however strange it seemed, he meant to befriend the imperiled men.

"We must gather a force and rescue them!" the major exclaimed, snatching a revolver from the table.

"No!" and again Baldor gave that imperious gesture. "It's impossible. To attempt it would

arouse the town; and you ought to know, from what you saw this afternoon, that that will be suicide."

"In God's name, what can we do, then?" groaned the alarmed and unhappy major. "We must do something; and, as you said, at once, or it will be too late."

He wrung his hands and paced the room like a caged animal.

Before Baldor could speak, the inner door opened, and Grace presented herself, her face ashy white and her form trembling.

Her father saw at a glance that she had heard all.

"This is no place for you!" he said, in tones wholly at variance with those he commonly used in addressing her.

"What suggestions had you to make?" she asked, ignoring her father and directing her question to the dwarf.

"None!" cried Baldor, hoarsely. "Would to God I had; for something must be done, and that speedily! They were taking them toward the northern gorge, when I discovered them. I ran here as fast I could. If we only had time! If we only had time!"

"Do nothing until I return!" the girl commanded.

Then, she darted through the door by which she had appeared, and was heard scampering toward the kitchen.

As for the major, he sat as if turned to stone. What his daughter's plans were, and what she meant by thus taking the affair out of his hands were, to him, inscrutable problems.

She returned in a marvelously short time, and with her came Peggy Shields.

In their arms they carried some singular looking bundles.

"Now," she said, her face flushing, as if the thought that she might be doing something unwomanly had suddenly come to her, "we are ready. I think, if it is not already too late, that I have hit on a plan to rescue these men. If you are willing to trust everything to my direction, come with us; and I will explain as we hurry along."

And, in another minute, the entire party were in the street and hastening through the pitchy gloom.

Signal Sam and his companion had been successful in their hunt; and this success explained the cause of their delay. In the wildest part of the mountain range they came on and killed a grizzly. The animal toppled over a ledge as he writhed and pawed the air in his death-agonies; and into the depths of the canyon where he had fallen, the twain determined to go, for Sam was anxious to secure the skin.

The ascent and descent of the canyon and the skinning of the brute consumed several hours of valuable time, and when they started on their return trip it was already growing late.

Hence they did not reach the vicinity of Silverton until some time after dark.

All unsuspecting of the black charges against them, they descended leisurely from the heights above the camp and took their way through one of the defiles leading to it. As they were about to emerge from the black mouth of the pass, they found themselves surrounded by armed men, and realized they were prisoners.

"What's the meaning of this?" Sam demanded, not relishing such treatment. "Get out of the way and let us go on. We're neither murderers nor road-agents, that we should be insulted in this style."

"Hain't ye, though!" growled a voice which they did not recognize. "Well, now, we've been setting it down that you're both o' them!"

Before they could protest further they found themselves seized by strong arms, their weapons removed, and their hands and feet bound, and in this condition they were borne toward the wild gorge leading northward from the town.

As they went along, the man who had first addressed them, and who was presumably the leader, descanted at length on their supposed crime, and thus they learned what it was they were charged with.

"A pretty fool you must believe me, to think I'd rob myself and kill my own messenger!" Signal Sam asserted, with great bitterness, when he fully understood the accusations.

"Not so much fool, likely, as scoundrel," was the quiet reply of the leader. "We calculate we understand you purty well. So kickin' won't do a mite o' good. I 'low if ye've got any prayers, ye mout' as well be sayin' them."

The prisoners, brave as they were, could not repress a shudder at these ominous words.

The gorge lay some distance to the north of Silverton; and, as their self-constituted judges and intended executioners insisted on carrying

them lest they should escape, the time consumed in traversing the route was considerable. It was increased, too, by the fact that a very round-about way was chosen to prevent any one in the town from discovering their movements and intentions.

But, tortuous as was the route, its end was reached at last, and the mob and its helpless captives stood at length in the dense gloom of the gorge, with the dark, wet pines closing them in like the wings of death.

Without a word the nooses were adjusted, and the trailing ends of the long ropes flung over some stout branches overhead.

"Now, if ye've anything to say ye can say it," the leader declared, with rough graciousness. "You can have a couple o' minutes apiece to talk in, if ye want 'um. Not longer, fer we don't propose to take any chances o' some one comin'; and besides, we're a-drippin' now with the fog."

The sentences were barely concluded when a weird, uncanny light poured through the gloom, showing everything in grisly, suggestive colors. The light seemed not of this earth, but came apparently out of the black sky above.

At the same instant a bar of white played across the bare face of the canyon wall, twenty feet or more above the heads of the awe-struck mob. There it quivered for one awful moment. Then, traced across it in letters of fire appeared,

"THOU SHALT NOT KILL! SAITH THE LORD."

A howl of fear arose from the lips of the superstitious men, who saw in this a condemnation of their contemplated deed of violence. And even as it arose on the frightened air, spectral lights shone and gleamed along the upper end of the dark gorge, sounds of music were heard, and two white-robed, angelic figures, with misty, gauzy wings, appeared, chanting a rendition of the glad song heard by the lonely shepherds on the bleak, Judean hills:

"Glory to God in the highest! Peace on earth! Good will to men!"

The scared wretches could stand no more. With moans and shrieks of fright, they dropped weapons and ropes and fled pell-mell down the gorge, never once stopping to look back, nor halting till the streets of the town were gained.

CHAPTER XIV.

PROVING AN ALIBI.

SIGNAL SAM and Jack Dean were as much astounded and bewildered by the startling appearances as the Vigilantes; though Signal Sam did not share the superstitious feelings of the frightened mob. And Dean, unlettered and ignorant in a sense though he was, was persuaded that harm could not come from beings who came so opportunely with that message of peace on their lips.

Scarcely had the frightened wretches disappeared, however, when the strange lights and heavenly sounds died away and the blackness of darkness descended with a force that could almost be felt.

While the two men stood thus, bewildered and hesitating amid the gloom, a small and active form stole to their side and with a few quick strokes severed their bonds.

Ere this was accomplished others were heard hurrying forward; and the well-known voice of John Glenwood broke the silence:

"Come, we haven't a moment to lose! They are free, are they Baldor? Then, let's be traveling. Those scamps may get over their scare after they've run a little way, and conclude to return. Or they may tell the story to others who will not be so credulous."

The released men stood as if stupefied and dreaming.

"Glenwood! Baldor!" exclaimed Signal Sam; hoarsely.

"Not expecting us to work together in harness?" chuckled Baldor, comprehending the meaning of the speaker. "It does seem strange! You'll have to acknowledge, though, that we can pull admirably well together, when we try!"

"But the angels!" squeaked Dean, more puzzled than ever.

"A very simple trick, and easily explained. We must seek a place of greater security, first thing. Come! Those villains will take the back track in a few minutes, if they haven't done so already."

There was a rustling as of feminine drapery just beyond the major, but the all-concealing gloom would surrender none of its secrets; and, quickened to a sense of their peril, Signal Sam

and Jack Dean turned about and plunged down the gorge under the guidance of the nimble-footed Baldor.

When they emerged from it, their diminutive guide turned sharply to the left and pressed on over the boulder-set way.

At length he halted in a sort of *cul de sac*, which frowning cliffs completely walled in and shut off on the side toward the town.

"Take a look around," said Baldor, striking a match and letting its flame pierce the darkness for a moment. "We'll understand each other better."

The sputtering light, extinguished before it had time to wax into a steady blaze, revealed the tall form and firm face of Glenwood, the imp-like figure of the dwarf, and the familiar features of Grace Glenwood and Peggy Shields. The latter were appareled in ghostly white, and the wings sweeping backward from the shoulders like the pinions of kneeling cherubim showed them to be the angelic figures that had frightened and dispersed the mob. Peggy was smiling and dimpling with the pleasure of their exploit, but on the face of Miss Glenwood rested a conscious blush which gave to it a feverish and unnatural color.

"I am afraid our friend Baldor is somewhat reckless!" said the major, gravely. "Very little explanation will be needed, after that. There is no chance, I suppose, that that light could have been seen from the town?"

"None at all," Signal Sam assured, "I know the place very well."

"We'd better halt here, then, and lay some plan of action."

"In the first place, though, I suppose you have a natural curiosity to know how we discovered that you had been taken, and how we accomplished your release. Baldor, who has unexpectedly shown himself truly a friend in time of need, gave us the information; and my daughter hit upon the plan of rescue which has worked so well."

"I think I have some idea of how it was done," Sam asserted, in a voice full of strange thoughtfulness and tender emotion. "You took great risks and we owe our lives to you. But go on; I am anxious for the story."

"I knew you could guess, after what had been revealed by Baldor's match. It was easily done; and, as it turned out, the risks were nowise great. Fortunately, everything was ready. At a Christmas exhibition in Denver, last year, those costumes were worn by Grace and Peggy. The rest was simply a manipulation of red and green fire; and the words were thrown on the face of the canyon wall by means of a magic lantern which I had carried to a niche in the rocks above the gorge. Grace and Peggy were concealed in the upper part of the gorge; and at the proper moment set off more red fire, and appeared, singing, as you saw them."

"It worked like a charm!" and the major rubbed his hands gleefully. "Yet, it's only right to say, that it could not have been accomplished without the aid of Baldor. He knew, seemingly by intuition, just the point the mob was making for and where it would stop, and we were thus able to gain the rocks before the scamps arrived and post ourselves in just the right places. Yes, gentlemen, you have much to thank him for."

"And now what's to be done?" the dwarf questioned, thus escaping the shower of thanks and congratulations that was commencing to rain on him. "We can't stay here always, you know. And I ought to be back at the Placer this very minute."

The little party were huddling and shivering in the chilly mist, and the female portion of it now took the opportunity of removing the cumbersome wings and concealing their white garments beneath the heavy wraps they carried.

Much low laughter and jesting were indulged in as memory recalled the scared faces of the Vigilantes, showing so ghastly under the unearthly glare; no one seeming more light-hearted and mirthful than Baldor.

"Ay, what's to be done?" Glenwood queried, echoing the words of the dwarf. "It isn't a pleasant place out here, especially for the girls. What I mean though, is, what is to be done in your case? They can return to the house, under Baldor's guidance. But you two! Such a course would be suicidal for you!"

"Explain the charges in full, and a way may be suggested," said Sam. "We don't understand the affair fully. What caused the suspicion that Dean and I did the robbing and killing out on the mountain this morning? We were told that we were so charged. But, why?"

"The messenger that escaped swears it was you. That's all. And that is enough for these

men, and especially for your enemies. Baldor says Adair had nothing to do with and had no knowledge of the movements of that crowd awhile ago. I think he must be mistaken."

"Not at all!" the dwarf declared. "I know what I'm talking about. I'm not saying, you understand, that Adair would be too good for anything of that kind, or that he wouldn't be glad of such an opportunity. But I know he had nothing to do with that and knew nothing of it. I've my ideas of who was at the head of the gang, but I prefer to keep them to myself until the proof is stronger. As for the part I've played, all I ask is that you let the deed speak for itself and credit me with good intentions. I'm not a saint; neither am I the little devil some people are fond of painting me."

"I'm shore ye're not; an' I axes yer pardon fer what I've said of ye!" declared the warm-hearted Peggy, pricked by the feeling that she had done Baldor great injustice in her opinion of him.

"And the double crime was committed at about what time in the morning?" Signal Sam asked.

"Between nine and ten o'clock," replied the major.

"Good! Do you hear that, Dean? Where were we at that very time?"

"At the Spread Eagle Mine!" Dean replied promptly.

"That's just where we were, and we can prove it. You know, major, we'd been talking about the new vein that had been struck at the Spread Eagle; and curiosity prompted Jack and me to visit the place this morning, as it lay in our way. And we were there at the very time this robbery and murder was committed. We didn't leave there, in fact, till nearly noon; and I'm sure the people of the Spread Eagle will be glad to testify to it."

"In that case," said the major, thoughtfully, "the best plan will be for you to give yourselves up; and demand an examination the first thing in the morning. You can surrender just after daylight, and I'll see that reliable men are placed to guard the jail, so that there can be no treachery. I would advise you to surrender at once but that I know the mob element is all-powerful to-night; and to do so would only be imperiling your lives."

The major's advice seemed so excellent and his reasoning so conclusive that Dean and Signal Sam decided to act on it. So they remained behind in the concealment of the pocket, while the others went on into the town.

Glenwood immediately gathered a strong force of reliable men—men who were known to be friendly to the accused, and laid before them the plan he had hastily outlined.

With the appearance of the sun came Signal Sam and Jack Dean. Silverton had, some weeks previous, instituted a sort of municipal government and elected a mayor, marshal and other officers for the proper administration of the code of laws which had been adopted. To the proper official, therefore, they went, and demanded that they be lodged in jail until such time as they could be given an examination.

Glenwood and his friends were present to see that there was no hitch in this important part of the programme; and before the enemies of the accused were aware that they had appeared, the ponderous doors of the strong log jail had closed on them, and the voluntary patrol began its self-imposed duty.

As soon as the news got abroad there was much furious fuming and bustling about of angry men, and Kid Adair and his pals attempted to organize a force to storm and take the jail. This was a job, though, that very few of Adair's fighting men cared to undertake. In the first place, Glenwood was known to be a dangerous man to encounter when once he was thoroughly aroused, and in addition the men he had gathered as a patrol were as recklessly courageous and as quick with their revolvers as any men of the town.

The mayor granted the major's request to give his friends an immediate hearing, and at nine o'clock the accused were brought into the hastily extemporized court-room.

Before that time, however, the men of the Spread Eagle Mine had arrived, and their statements were beginning to have a moderating effect on the excited crowd.

Adair's tools did all they could to counteract the influence of these men; but as the Spread Eagle "boys," as they were familiarly called, had good reputations for veracity, these efforts could not be held up as shining examples of success.

Seldom was a court-room so packed. Almost the entire population was in the room or crowding as near to it as possible in an effort to hear

what might be said. All work was suspended, as if the occasion was some great holiday.

The result might have been foretold. An *alibi* was clearly proved; and before the sun had reached the meridian, Signal Sam and Jack Dean walked from the court-room, free men.

CHAPTER XV.

SHADOWS OF ILL.

EVEN though so signal a victory had been gained, the trio of friends could not feel at all safe. But whatever they felt they gave no signs of it. They knew that Kid Adair could not rest quietly under such a blow. Defeated thus, he would take some new course and return again to the attack until one party or the other was overthrown.

They were not prepared to fully believe Baldor in his assertion that Adair had no hand in the attempt of the previous night. And as for the pigmy, himself, discuss the subject as they might, they could not fathom the motives governing his actions.

What they feared most, at that juncture, was that Adair's followers might be able to again inflame the passions of the populace, notwithstanding the *alibi* that had been so clearly proven. The funeral of the slain messenger was to be held that afternoon, and in it there might be opportunity for the accomplishment of their hellish designs.

But the day passed without interruption; and at night a strong guard was stationed about the house occupied by Signal Sam and Jack Dean.

The day following, arrangements were made to start another messenger over the mountains to Pueblo, and as before every effort was exerted to keep the matter a profound secret.

All the ready money the major had, together with all he could borrow, had been in the wallets of the men who had been robbed. But if they would work the Big Bonanza and wrench from it, the fortunes it held, proper machinery must be obtained.

In this emergency, mortgage papers for exorbitantly large amounts were executed by the Big Bonanza Company, pledging the mine for their payment; and with these the messenger set out.

After his departure, the days passed very quietly; too quietly, in truth, to please Signal Sam and his friends. The powerful gambler element seemed to have abandoned its enmity, and to be bent on pacification and tranquillity.

"It doesn't mean any good, though, you may be sure!" Sam asserted, in a conversation with Glenwood. "I'm always nervous when things get too awfully still this way. It makes me think of those dead, sleepy days we sometimes have before a tornado jumps down on us."

This feeling was not lessened by an occurrence of the evening. As Signal Sam was turning homeward, having passed the day in the tunnel of the mine, he caught the patter of light footsteps behind him. Darkness had fallen, and recent events did not tend to make him trustful. So he turned quickly, with drawn and cocked weapon, and peered into the gloom.

He was greeted by a light laugh, which, from the strange, gurgling sound, he knew came from the throat of the dwarf.

"Going to throw balls? Not at a friend, you wouldn't," Baldor cackled. "I just want to speak to you a minute, that's all."

"There's no one with you?" said Sam, advancing toward him and peering into the shadows.

"No! 'Pon honor! I'm wandering by moonlight alone"—though I must say the moonlight's somewhat hid by the clouds just now. I have a little message for you, if you care to receive it."

Convinced there was no trap, Signal Sam lowered his weapon and stepped to the side of the trail.

"That's right! I was half-afraid you wouldn't stop, times are so scary, and I didn't care to try to hunt you up. I haven't much to say. It's only this: Watch Kid Adair! He's up to something. Just what it is I don't know and can't find out. If I can learn anything more definite I'll try to let you know. He's getting some scheme in shape for springing, and I thought it my duty to let you know it. Wish I could tell you more. Keep your eyes open. That's all!"

And with a bound the dwarf was off through the darkness, leaving Sam staring and wondering, and no wiser than before.

The dwarf's words tended, however, to make him even more uneasy than he had previously been, and after a consultation with John Glenwood he decided that Adair ought to be shadowed.

"I'll have to do it, myself," he concluded,

turning the matter over and over again in his mind. "There's no one I can trust. Dean would try it, if I asked him, but since he has taken such a stand with the major and has shut off on the liquor, those scamps haven't any use for him, and his movements would attract attention. There was a time when he'd have been just the man; but not now!"

"Yes; whatever is done I'll have to do myself. And I might as well set about it. If they're really hatching a scheme against us as Baldor declared and as I believe, the sooner its character is discovered the better."

"If I go about it, though, I'll have to disguise. And there's the rub; for I never tried anything of that kind in my life."

He took two or three days to fully settle on the line of work he should attempt; and then appeared at the Placer in the character of a loud-voiced and half-tipsy miner, drawn to that Eldorado by the wild rumors which had reached the outer world.

"Jim Steele's my name, you bet; from Socorro way," he asserted, tugging at the half-chewed cigar which he held clumsily between his lips. "Come up hyer to make a stake. Bloomin', flyin' place you've got hyer. 'Tis so. Country south of hyer hain't no good any more. Too many Mexicans a-workin' fer jest no wages 'tall down there."

"Take a drink? No, thankee. The p'izen ye've got up this way seems to kinder upset me. Hain't had but two drinks this blessed evenin', an' my cocoanut's a-wobblin' now, same's if it was green an' full o' milk yit."

"Yes, sir! Four weeks out from Socorro, come nex' Wednesday. Turrible mountains! Turrible trails. Hain't never seen worse. I reckon you folks don't git any more mail than the law allows you. But you've got a nice town hyer. Turrible nice town, if it is a little out o' the way an' lonesome. Lonesome, sir! Why, lonesome hain't nothin', as I've said a many a time, if on'y you're makin' plenty o' money. Money's the root of all evil an' the staff o' life, as the Scriptor says, an' without it ever'thing is vanity. I allow ole Solomon knowed what he was a-talkin' about when he said that. Yes, sir, ole Sol's head were level as a billiard-table."

"An' talkin' of money 'minds me that I hain't got any of that waxatin' stuff. S'pose they hain't any gen'elman hyer as would like to grub-stake me, is they? 'Twouldn't take much, ye know, as I'm one o' the most 'economical' chaps that ever swung a drill. Kin live on 'most nothin', if the float's promisin'."

No one seemed to desire to "grub-stake" the loud-voiced talker, and after dilating further on his ability to live principally on hope and diaphanous air, he wandered toward another group of loungers, and there recommenced his philosophical disquisitions.

In those talks and wanderings he visited every room and conversed with almost every man in the Placer, without his identity being once suspected.

Little heed was paid to him, as men of his supposed stamp were arriving daily and making themselves disagreeably familiar. And they were all wanting to be "grub-staked;" that is, wanting to have some man or men supply them with provisions while they prospected among the hills, the ones standing the expense to receive a certain share or interest in the "finds." Some of the richest men in the mountains, and one or two who have been United States senators, got their start on the road to great wealth by supplying "grub-stakes" to needy prospectors.

But no one stood ready to thus form a partnership with the man from Socorro; and, tired from his perambulations and hoarse from much talking, he seated himself in a cozy corner and was soon apparently sound asleep.

By seeming chance he had dropped into a chair not far from a table presided over by Kid Adair.

Finally the gamesters, disgusted with steady losses, rose to go, and the chairs about the table gradually filled with Adair's friends and confidants.

At this the man from Socorro began to snore and give other indications of heavy slumber.

Much chaffering of nonsense filled up the time for awhile.

Then, there was a pause; and one of the gamblers, heedless of the proximity of the snorer, remarked, *sotto voce*:

"Another messenger out on foul will make certain people open their eyes, eh?"

Adair gave the speaker a warning look and glanced at the sleeper.

"Remove that fellow, will you?" he cried, turning to the man whose special duty was to

clear the house of drunken, noisy or unwelcome visitors.

And Signal Sam, with curiosity roused to the highest pitch, was bundled from the apartment with as little ceremony as if he had been the veriest tramp.

CHAPTER XVI.

A KNOCK-DOWN BLOW.

NOTHING could have so vexed and disturbed the masquerader as to be thus trundled from the room just when he seemed on the point of making valuable discoveries. His brain was in a whirl as he crouched in the shadows and endeavored to uncover what lay behind the gambler's low words. Had the last messenger been robbed or murdered?

He could not answer.

"If there was only some way by which I could get within hearing distance!" struggling with the perplexities that beset him. "It's next to impossible, though. I can't get near them again, even if I had some other disguise at hand, which I haven't. And as the room does not open at that point to the outside, there really isn't any chance for me to get close to them. My! I'd give big money to hear what they're saying, now. And it would be worth big money to me, too, I've no doubt."

For a long while he stood there, peering through the half-opened door. He could see the sports grouped about the table, with heads bowed together in earnest conversation, and occasionally catch the light laugh that greeted some pleasing remark. But he could hear nothing to give him the slightest inkling of the subject under discussion.

"Might as well give it up!" he said, with a sort of desperateness. "I can do nothing further, to-night."

Then he slouched his hat well over his eyes, and shambled from the place.

He returned to the charge next night. But the gamblers were wary, and he heard nothing. Night after night, in different disguises, he returned again and again to the attack. But the efforts were barren of results; and he could only eat out his fiery heart with restless anxiety and impotent longings.

The welcome news that the burro train had come in sight gave new direction to his thoughts, however, and served for a time to banish these shadows of ill. But they came back, when he received the unwelcome intelligence that the messenger had not returned with it.

He had reached Pueblo, the statement ran; had delivered his order and procured the machinery wanted. He had also started on the return trip with the burro train, with the apparent intention of going through with it. After accompanying it a long distance, however, he had left it, saying he was tired of the San Juan country and had determined to seek greener fields and pastures new.

"I don't like the looks of it," Glenwood declared, when talking the matter over with Signal Sam, that evening. "Everything seems to be all right, though, as far as I can discover. He must have visited the parties in Pueblo, turned the mortgages and letters over and executed his commission in a business-like way. The presence of the burro train with the goods shows that. But there should have been letters from the Pueblo firm, bills or something to show the cost of the articles and of their transportation and what our indebtedness is."

"He must have been given something of the kind, and why he didn't hand them to some one else when he concluded he didn't want to come any further is what puzzles me."

However, as the things ordered had arrived, and with them skilled workmen to set them up, repinings seemed wholly out of place and useless; and the partners comprising the Big Bonanza Company turned their attention to the development of their property, knowing that the future would reveal whatever of mystery there was about the affair. Bills, notes and mortgages have an unpleasant habit of becoming due and payable, and the ones they had given were not likely to prove exceptions to so general a rule.

The tunnel beneath the vein of rich ore had been pushed far into the mountain. It was located at a point almost half-way to the summit, as are the tunnels of many of the richest mines in the Colorado ranges. In addition, a tramway had been built to carry the ore to the stamp-mill, which was to be erected near the town.

Thus it was not long before the mine was in complete working condition, and the separation of the silver from the worthless material was begun.

The mine was also an easy one to work, the

ore being of a quality which rendered the separation of the silver not at all difficult and comparatively inexpensive.

To all appearances glorious days were now dawning, and the road to wealth opened as alluringly as a well-traveled and beautiful highway, along which one may walk and drink in the sweetness of earth and sky without thought of molestation or a dream of peril.

Since that terrible period, so fraught with danger and filled with excitement and deadly menace, the manner of the people had likewise changed—changed as radically as had the brightening fortunes of the members of the Big Bonanza Company. True, the time had not been long passed since these same men, many of them, had howled and screamed like wild beasts for the blood of the men on whom they now smiled and fawned; but time, that sluggard in dull, monotonous places, moved with the nimblest of feet in the wild mining-camps of the Rockies, when the nights are full of hope and the gorgeous days full of promise. A month sometimes contains more of life and achievement than does a year elsewhere.

And thus it came about that the Big Bonanza and the men who controlled its destinies once more assumed a leading and prominent part in the affairs of Silverton.

The change seemed to have its effect on Kid Adair and his satellites as on the other citizens of the place. They did not indeed venture on familiarity or friendship; but they seemed to have dropped all open enmity and become content to let the Big Bonanza men go their ways in peace.

Signal Sam and the major were very willing to have it so, for the truce was very enjoyable and they were entirely too busy with their own affairs to heed the doings of the gambling element.

"If they'll let us alone, we'll do the same by them," Sam had more than once observed. "I don't like them, and they know it; and if I could have my way they wouldn't remain in the town twenty-four hours. But if the miners are fools enough to want to spend their money at the gambling tables and at the bar, I suppose there's no way of stopping them; and if there was a way we couldn't afford to try it, now."

The major and Dean thought the same; and in this self-satisfied style the pleasant days of summer drifted over their heads.

Life held a great deal of sunshine for Sam at that time. He was, as far as mining and wealth went, in a fair way to realize the dream of his life. Congenial and profitable occupation is the basis and essence of true happiness; and this he had. And above all, prized higher than the precious metal daily blasted from the bowels of the mountain, was the belief that he had gained a place in the affections of the major's beautiful daughter.

Modest by nature, and made somewhat difficult by the life he had so long led, he had never yet ventured to put the great question to the test; but the eyes of love are keen, and close watching had led him to hopes the highest and purest.

But little was seen of Baldor during that period. He was seldom on the streets, except in the daytime, and then the men of the Big Bonanza were busy in the stamp-mill or in the mine. He held no communication with them, and had not spoken to Signal Sam since uttering that last warning.

"I'm interested in the little scamp!" Signal Sam confessed, whenever Baldor was mentioned. "He did us a royal good turn once, and I'll never forget it. We hadn't a particle of claim on him, and yet he took great risks to save Dean and me. I'd like to know why he did it, but I suppose I never shall. I'll aid him to the extent of my ability, though, if it is ever in my power."

"And me the same," said Dean, heartily. "I'd risk my neck for the little thief."

Three months had elapsed since starting the last messenger over the mountains to Pueblo, and the day of payment for the stamp-mill and other machinery and supplies was close at hand. The Big Bonanza Company was straining every nerve to place itself in condition to redeem its paper and so maintain its credit in mining circles.

The coming of a little missive through the post-office at this time filled them, however, with consternation and dismay.

There was constant communication with the outer world, now, by means of the burro-trains, and they had written to the Pueblo firm, asking for the amount of their bill and making some inquiries concerning the acts of their messenger and the papers he had turned over.

The letter was from the head of the firm, and ran thus:

"MY DEAR SIR:—

"Your favor of a recent date at hand. In reply would say that I do not wholly comprehend the drift of your questions. No papers of any kind were delivered to us, except a letter, in which you named the articles you wanted. Our acquaintance with the head of your firm, Major John Glenwood, was such that no papers were necessary. We simply charged you on our books with the material and machinery supplied, and sent by your messenger a bill for the same. We accorded you the same treatment that we are accustomed to extend to our oldest and most reliable customers, viz: A credit of ninety days or ten per cent. off for cash. No cash accompanied your order, and we gave you ninety days in which to make payment. Find herewith a duplicate of the bill first sent.

"Very truly yours,

Glenwood read this over and over again, his face ashy pale and his eyes staring.

"What in the name of all that's wonderful does it mean?" he asked, turning upon his partners. "I don't understand it. If they didn't get the papers what became of them?"

He was answered by the opening of the door and the entrance of Kid Adair and the sheriff of the newly-organized county.

"Gentlemen, good-morning! Very happy to meet you!" and Adair gave one of his oiliest smiles and one of his profoundest bows. "A matter of a little business will explain my intrusion."

He glanced at the officer, and the latter took a folded paper from his pocket and extended it to Glenwood.

"A notice of foreclosure," he explained. "Mr. Adair holds certain mortgages, as that will explain. They are due and—"

He stopped, confusedly, and looked at Adair.

"Yes," said the latter, coming to the rescue.

"Mortgages given to Stanton & Company, of Pueblo. They came into my hands in a perfectly honorable way and for value received. They are due, as you must know. I need the money and as I felt sure you could not pay all of it down, I thought it best not to waste time but begin proceedings at once."

He halted and again glanced at the sheriff.

"Ahem, yes!" and the official cleared his throat. "There is another document. I almost forgot it."

This was a notice of an action brought to stop the working of the mine, Adair alleging that it was being worked in a way to destroy the value of his mortgages.

"What will you do, gentlemen?" the gambler questioned, with cool effrontery. "Will you surrender the mine or pay the money? If neither, I shall have to push these cases to immediate trial."

CHAPTER XVII.

RELENTLESS ADAIR.

SAM HOLCOMB glared at the smiling villain as if he wished he might take him by the throat and choke the life out of him.

"Do!" cried Glenwood. "We shall do nothing. The mortgages given to Stanton & Company are not payable for two days; but if they were payable this minute we should still do nothing but defy you, for we're certain you never obtained possession in a legal manner. I have a letter, just received this morning, in which Stanton & Company declare that no mortgages were given them. So if there is a transfer indorsed on them it is forged, and we'll hold you responsible for that forgery. I begin to understand, now, why our messenger never returned. He feared to!"

He leaned back in his office chair, while he strove to regain breath, and looked Adair over with a cool scorn that was very trying to the gambler's temper.

"Very well," said the latter, coloring in spite of his efforts at self control. "I think I'm prepared for a fight, if you are."

With this, he backed through the doorway, the officer doing the same, after he had made a note on the papers of service of process and tossed them on the table.

"Now, what does that mean?" Sam asked, when the men had departed.

"That we're in for a fight, my dear fellow. Simply that and nothing more."

"As if that wasn't enough, after all the fighting we've had this summer!" Sam growled. "I suppose there can be no doubt that Adair has those mortgages?"

"None in the world, I think. That messenger played traitor! But, getting control of the mortgages isn't getting control of the mine, as Adair will discover before he gets through."

"Certainly not. But I'd feel better if the new officers were of a different class. You know, we were having all we cared to attend to when that election came off and the gamblers had things pretty much their own way. The fellow they put in as judge don't know any more law than a burro might, and he'll twist everything against us and in favor of Adair. There, in my opinion, is where the great danger lies."

"I hadn't thought of that," returned the major, concern showing in his face. "And it will take a good six weeks to hear from the Pueblo men! If we had one of the firm here to testify in our behalf we could snap our fingers at Adair. The deposition of one of them would do as well. But we haven't either, and before we can get either, Adair will have time to annoy us a great deal."

"And besides," he continued, after a long pause in which he was evidently turning the matter carefully over in his mind, "there is that threatened injunction. That's the worst of all, for if they stop us from working the mine we cannot get money with which to meet this bill of Stanton's, and that might be the utter ruin of our credit."

"Give me time to think it over," Sam requested. "It's my opinion we'll have to resort to stern measures. There is no other way to deal with these bounds. If we seem to succumb to them in the least they'll take every advantage of it and parade it around as an evidence of our weakness. Besides, I can't believe we'll ever get justice from that judge. You saw how the sheriff acted. The judge is more under their thumbs even than he is."

He left the room and walked slowly toward the stamp-mill. From what he knew of Adair's character he was convinced that the gambler would not allow the grass to grow under his feet in his efforts to annoy, subjugate and humiliate the men he so much hated and feared. When his stroke fell it would be like lightning out of a clear sky.

He found his worst forebodings more than realized when he reached the mill. A little knot of excited workmen were gathered in the yard. Among them stood Jack Dean, his squeaky voice filled with a sort of impotent rage.

"Ding! But I'm glad you've come!" he wheezed, stretching out his hand to Sam. "The sheriff's locked the shebang up, and I 'low from the looks o' things he's gittin' ready to go up to the mine and do the same there."

"And he had papers authorizing him to do that?" Sam questioned, his manner equally wrathful.

"I s'pose so. He had some kind. He showed 'um to me, but I wasn't scholar enough to make them out."

"Is he in there, now?" and Sam nodded his head toward the building, while the bewildered workmen crowded about with confused queries.

"Yes. Him and that blast blasted gambler."

"Then come with me!" addressing the workmen this time. "Slip around the bluff here, so he won't see you, and we'll make a run for the mine. Dean, you go and tell Glenwood what has happened, and ask him to gather all the men and arms he can and come to the mine right away. I haven't time to explain, now."

With a comprehending glance, Dean darted off on his mission, and Sam Holcomb, piloting the miners by the circuitous route around the rear of the buildings and back of the bluff, led them at a lively gait up the slope.

As they neared the tunnel they heard a blast, and a mass of ore tumbled from the quartz vein above almost into the tunnel's mouth.

"That's all right," said Sam, hurrying in before the dust and debris had ceased falling.

"Now call down all the miners and tear away the lumber we used in bracing that weak place the other day and bring it here. We'll want it to make a barricade. Neither Kid Adair nor that sheriff will get in here unless they first drive us out."

The men, although they did not at all understand the merits of the controversy, hurried willingly off to do his bidding, showing their confidence in him by this act. He had been uniformly kind to the men in his employ, and now that he was in trouble they seemed anxious to aid him.

"My!" he cried, as he stood alone in the mouth of the tunnel, peering along the downward slope to catch sight of Adair and the sheriff, "if we're to be cooped up in here any length of time we'll need food and water. There's no telling what may be ahead."

Then he shouted to the nearest workman:

"Slip out and make your way to town in a roundabout way, will you? And tell the major

that the chances are we may have to stay in here several days, in which case we'll need water and something to eat. Watch that you don't miss him, for he may be on the way here already."

The man tipped his hat and moved toward the entrance. In another moment he was gone; and Sam could see him hurrying down the slope, avoiding the beaten trail and using all speed.

"If Adair will only give us an hour's time, I'll defy him to do his worst!" with a curling of the quivering and expanded nostrils. "He thinks he's got us, no doubt, but if I'm not mistaken in my calculations he'll find himself woefully left."

The miners had gathered from all quarters and work on the barricade was commenced. They evidently understood that time was precious for they lost none in curious questions and speculations, but worked like men who realize that defeat or victory may hang on a single minute. There were only ten of them, all told; but well armed and sheltered by the barricade, they could hold a regiment at bay. Most of them had revolvers, for the western miner as a rule puts a high value on that weapon, and a dozen years ago few of them worked or played without big six-shooters belted to their waists.

In addition to this force Sam momentarily expected the coming of Glenwood with a little company armed with Winchesters.

While the men worked, he climbed into a crevice at the tunnel's mouth, from which point he could oversee and direct the work, and at the same time gain a view of the slopes of the mountain on the side next the town.

The timber used in the barricade was principally composed of pieces large and heavy enough to turn a bullet. The barricade was made V-shaped, so that it could not be easily broken down, and placed to command a view of every approach. Small openings were left to serve as loop-holes and points of outlook and let in the light. Nevertheless, when the work was done, they found the tunnel very dark, because of the obstructed rays of the sun.

"We won't need light," Sam assured, as he climbed from his perch and surveyed the work with a smile of satisfaction. "Just so we have enough to see to shoot, should shooting become necessary, which I hope may not be the case. We'll throw some lead, though, before we let that Adair crowd gain possession. I think the law will uphold us, when the true inwardness of this attempt is shown up, as it will be if I live. I hardly think Adair can get any men to try to storm this place, when they see how well we're fortified. Perhaps he'll even back down, himself, when he sees we're fixed to receive him."

He again climbed to the niche, but had no sooner done so than he leaped down again, shouting:

"Here comes Glenwood and Dean, with some burros. They're bringing supplies. Hurrah!"

And he hurried down the slope, to discover as he drew near that Glenwood was also accompanied by his daughter and by Miss Peggy Shields.

CHAPTER XVIII.

TREACHERY.

GLENWOOD had six men with him, in addition to Jack Dean, who, when there was need for valorous action, was himself a host.

Three burros were weighted with water-casks slung on either side of saddles which in their general appearance resembled saw-bucks. The others carried a miscellaneous assortment of cooking utensils, bedding and supplies. As for the men, they bore their arms and as many canteens of water as they could stagger under.

"I knew what we'd need, as soon as Jack Dean told me what had occurred at the stamp-mill. I had all these nearly ready when your runner arrived from here. But, we mustn't stop to talk. A party left the town just after we did, and they have been gaining on us ever since we struck the slope. They'll be here in less than five minutes."

Having made this breathless communication, the major gave orders to again advance. Sam ran on ahead, and when the weary party reached the mouth of the tunnel, a portion of the barricade had been removed to admit them.

Once inside, the defenses were again strengthened, and a close lookout kept through the loop-holes for the appearance of Kid Adair and his allies.

"I don't understand how it could have been done, but that rascally sheriff must have had that injunction order in his pocket when he came to the office with those other papers," said

the major, taking his eye from one of the apertures and speaking to Signal Sam who stood close beside him. "Such an unheard of course of procedure was never known."

"As I told you, the judge don't know anything about law," Sam made answer. "Adair doubtless made him think that was the proper thing to do, and the injunction order was issued. Whatever Adair says is law, is law to him, you may depend on that. And the sheriff isn't any better. He's got more sense than the judge, but he's a greater villain, and will do anything to please his master, Kid Adair."

The conversation was interrupted by the advent of the sheriff and his posse, for such the crowd he had gathered evidently was. They halted at a respectable distance, when they beheld the barricade, and after a whispered consultation between the officer and Adair, the former advanced and bawled:

"Hello, the mine!"

"What do you want?" Glenwood asked.

For reply the man drew out a legal-looking document, and proceeded to read it in a very loud voice.

When he had concluded he remained with the paper held in his hands, and stared at the barricade as if he expected some sort of a statement from those within the tunnel. But as none was made, he came a little closer and shouted:

"Hain't got anything to say to it? Then, in the name of the law, I order you to give up the mine."

"You won't find any authority in that instrument to support such a demand," returned Glenwood, speaking so that all of Adair's men could hear him. "You'd better read it again, for your own benefit. It simply commands us to stop working the mine. Well, you can inform your master, Kid Adair, that work in the mine has stopped. And if you don't believe it, you can come in and see for yourself. But you'll have to leave your men out there. You can fully ascertain that the command of the honorable court has been obeyed without bringing any one with you."

The man seemed nonplused, and stared again at the instrument to see if Glenwood had properly interpreted its meaning. Adair's allies, huddling on the stony slope beyond, appeared likewise uneasy, moving restlessly and anxiously about, or engaging in spirited conversation.

"Read it over!" shouted the major. "You'll find it just as I say."

"Slipped the cinches a little in that!" Signal Sam commenced, admiring the major's shrewd comprehension and quick insight. "You gave 'em that straight from the shoulder, major, and it has rattled them bad."

Glenwood smiled.

"I'm not a lawyer; but, from the reading of that order, I think we're fully complying with its demands. The sheriff has a right, no doubt, to come in here and see that we're obeying it; and I suppose he would also have the right to stay here all the time and see that it is not violated. He can do so, if he wants to, but there's nothing there, so far as I could make out, authorizing him to bring a mob in here for the purpose of taking possession of the property. If there was any sense or justice in that judge we could give bond to account strictly and honestly for the output of the mine, and go on with the work. That's my opinion; but there's no use to look to him for fair treatment."

The sheriff, not knowing what to do, had retreated, and was now conferring in whispers with Kid Adair.

He came back soon, and repeated his demand, finishing it with this extra official information:

"If you don't come out o' there, and deliver the mine over to us, we'll jus' camp here on the hillside till you're starved out."

"There you have it," said Signal Sam. "I knew it was bound to come."

Glenwood was about to reply to the officer's extraordinary order, when Jack Dean applied his lips to one of the apertures, and squeaked:

"Starve, and be dinged! We've got grub and water enough to last a month, and plenty guns an' am'nition. If ye don't believe it, jist perced to crowd us a little, will ye?"

"Good for you!" laughed "Lucky George" Bruce, who, much to Sam's disgust, had been with the party brought up by the major. "A bit of that kind of talk will make them think twice before they go further."

Jack Dean winced. Praise from "Lucky George" was not usually palatable to him.

The sheriff retreated, after receiving Dean's broadside, and the force on the hillside disposed itself as if to begin a regular siege.

An hour passed, and as there were no signs of

a hostile demonstration, the party within proceeded to arrange the tunnel with a view to comfort should the siege be protracted. Curtains of blankets upheld by ropes separated a section of it into rooms, and although the apartments thus formed were dark, the gloom mattered little so long as the supply of candles held out.

At intervals members of the sheriff's force were seen passing to and from the town, but no one ventured near the barricade.

"It may be they are waiting for darkness to aid them," said Signal Sam, in some perturbation. "We will have to prepare to receive them, should that be the case."

If there was one thing that annoyed him more than another during those hours of ceaseless vigil, it was that "Lucky George" haunted the ladies continually. Sam could hear him chattering nonsense to them whenever he left the barricade and came near what had been facetiously termed the "parlor," and it irritated him beyond measure.

Could he have seen the white and ghastly look which came to Bruce's face, after a stolen and almost forced interview with Grace, he would have felt commiseration for his would-be rival, rather than anger. But, Sam did not see this, and the fact that Grace seemed to tolerate the man he could not help detesting was like gall and wormwood in his cup of bitterness.

As night came on, Holcomb and those who acted as sentinels with him were relieved, and their places taken by a squad under the command of Jack Dean.

Sam, worn by the day's excitement, retired early to get what rest and sleep he could, fearful he might be awakened at any moment with the alarming information that an attack had commenced, or was intended. For a long time his troubled thoughts kept him awake, but he dropped into a half slumber about midnight.

From this he was aroused by a gentle shake, and the whispered words:

"Keep still!"

The gloom was intense, except at a point near the barricade, where two or three dim candles were sputtering and smoking. Yet, in spite of the darkness, he recognized by the voice the one who had aroused him. It was the pigmy, Baldor!

"What is it?" Sam asked, sitting bolt upright.

"I learned awhile ago that 'Lucky George' was one of your party. I knew that meant deviltry, so I slipped up here. There are a couple of boards loose at the bottom of the barricade, and it was no trouble for me to crawl through and pass the guards, who are half asleep because of the stillness."

"'Lucky George' is out there, now, talking to Adair and the sheriff."

"The deuce!" exclaimed Signal Sam, leaping to his feet.

"No, it's 'Lucky George'!" declared Baldor, with a characteristic chuckle. "And if I'm not mistaken, he's making arrangements to lead Adair's party in here by the way I came."

CHAPTER XIX.

CONCLUSION.

THE words seemed prophetic. A cry of confusion and alarm arose near the barricade. Jack Dean's squeaky voice was heard above the uproar, commanding resistance, and it was followed by a volley of pistol-shots that sounded deadly enough in the confined space to have done execution.

"Hurrah for Dean!" screamed Baldor, jumping up and down in his childish way and clapping his pudgy little hands. "Hurrah for Dean! He's as hard to catch napping as a weasel."

Sam did not stay to listen to these encomiums on his friend, but drew his weapons and leaped away like a flash, and soon his lion-like roar was heard near the barricade.

The men sleeping in the other apartments were also tumbling out now; and as they dashed past the dancing and red-coated figure of the dwarf, made visible by the tearing away of the front curtains, they rubbed their eyes in a bewildered way and muttered strange words of astonishment.

The din at the barricade grew into sounds of horrible conflict, showing that the combat had assumed the form of a hand-to-hand encounter. An occasional bullet from the outside however, hurtled past, striking the tunnel walls with a vicious "spat," and one coming uncomfortably near to the ears of the dwarf, he ducked his head and crouched and cowered in an angle in a most comical way.

"Better stay back!" he yelled, as he saw Miss

Glenwood and Peggy steal from their room, drawn by the terrible fears that assailed them. "Better stay back. Everything's going all right in front. We're bound to whip them."

The scream of a pistol ball emphasized his injunction, and they beat a hasty retreat.

The fight was over in ten minutes. But it had been a hot one while it lasted. "Lucky George" had endeavored to lead Adair's party to the inside, thinking the defenders could be surprised and taken while they slept. Jack Dean was a very light sleeper, however, and while he had negligently allowed himself to doze at his post, and had not discovered Bruce's exit nor the stealthy entrance of the dwarf, he was instantly aroused when Adair's men began to scramble through.

Glenwood's men were overwhelmingly victorious. Bruce, who, as the guide of the assaulting party, had crawled through the opening first, was knocked senseless and captured at the very onset of the fight. Adair and some of his principal men were slain, and a number of the others severely wounded.

Seeing they could not carry their point they had beaten a hasty retreat, and were now scattered over the mountain slope, making all expedition to the town.

With a white and fear-stricken face, "Lucky George"—whose title seemed now a sarcastic misnomer—was dragged, bound and helpless, from the entrance, and cast down rather roughly on the tunnel floor.

"Kill him!" cried some of the men, enraged beyond endurance. "Kill the sneak! He's the cause of all this. There wouldn't have been any fight, and not a man killed, but for him."

"No! No!" he pleaded, his voice taking on a piteous whine. "I was driven to it. Really, gentlemen, I ain't fit to die."

"And you ain't fit to live!" screamed Baldor, kicking viciously at the air.

"Hush! We'll alarm the ladies!" cautioned Sam.

The caution came too late. Miss Glenwood, knowing from the comparative quiet that now reigned, that the worst was over, had already ventured forth.

"Oh, don't let them kill me, Miss Glenwood!" pleaded the unhappy wretch, turning his frightened glances on that young woman.

"What did you mean by saying you were driven to it?" Glenwood demanded, paying no heed to his entreaties. "Speak up, if you expect us to have any mercy."

Thus cornered, and feeling that his life would pay the penalty if he were untruthful, Bruce made a confession that must have humiliated him to the dust:

He had been one of Adair's gamblers before coming to that section, and had expected to follow his nefarious calling in Silverton. But, falling in love with Glenwood's beautiful daughter, he had disguised his hawk-like instincts under the mask of a gentleman, and had attempted to win her for his own. Failing, he had sought revenge.

Being a frequent visitor to the house, he had, by prying and eavesdropping, learned when the messengers would start for Pueblo. With a companion, who had since left the vicinity, he had stopped them on the narrow ledge, shot one and taken the contents of their wallets, and attempted to throw the suspicion of the dastardly crime on Signal Sam and Jack Dean. He it was, too, who had led the little band which attempted to compass their death by hanging, that black night in the northern gorge.

The last messenger he had bribed to turn the mortgages over to him, and to take, instead, a letter which he had prepared for the purpose. The mortgages he had placed in the hands of Kid Adair, knowing that the gambler would stop at nothing to annoy and vex the men he so much hated.

Adair, who had become heavily involved and had borrowed beyond all hopes of ever repaying, was secretly preparing to leave the country, and was thus more easily induced to undertake any underhanded work that might injure Glenwood and Holcomb, believing that when he had done his worst he could vanish and leave the harassed men to gnash their teeth in impotent wrath.

The papers which the judge had issued against the Big Bonanza Company were clearly illegal, but Adair cared nothing for that so long as they served his purposes.

Bruce, however, true to no one, would have turned against the gambler, at the last, if the marriage proposal he had made to Grace that very evening, in the tunnel, had not been rejected with scorn. He had accompanied Glenwood for the purpose of betraying him; and after that, had, Judas like, done his worst.

When the confession was made, Grace pleaded for the release of the humiliated and crushed villain, who, she could not remember, had once risked his life to save hers. His life was spared; but he was destined to pass many years of it behind gloomy prison walls.

The seeming anomalous actions of the dwarf, Baldor, are easily explained. He had never liked his position and the associations at the Placer Palace: had an antipathy for George Bruce, whose history he knew only too well; and had conceived a genuine attachment for Signal Sam. Hence, when the critical time came, the good in him triumphed over the evil; and, rising above the selfishness of the life he had led, he proved himself a hero.

His reward was neither small nor slow in coming. He had talent and education, and the position of private secretary to Major Glenwood gave them scope and usefulness.

Some of the defenders of the tunnel had been injured in the fight, but their hurts were not so serious as to prevent their presence at the weddings which took place soon after, and which united Signal Sam Holcomb and Grace Glenwood, Jack Dean and Peggy Shields.

The thick-headed judge, made conscious of the errors of his ways, recalled the remarkable documents he had issued at Adair's solicitation, and work was recommenced at the mine and stamp-mill; and so rich and plentiful was the yield that independent fortunes have since blessed the owners of THE BIG BONANZA.

THE END.

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